

ROBERT BROWNING'S  
POETICAL WORKS

VOL. I.



THE POETICAL WORKS

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. I.

*PAULINE—SORDELLO*

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I DEDICATE THESE VOLUMES TO MY OLD FRIEND JOHN  
FORSTER, GLAD AND GRATEFUL THAT HE WHO, FROM THE  
FIRST PUBLICATION OF THE VARIOUS POEMS THEY INCLUDE,  
HAS BEEN THEIR PROMPTEST AND STAUNCHEST HELPER,  
SHOULD SEEM EVEN NEARER TO ME NOW THAN ALMOST  
THIRTY YEARS AGO

R. B.

LONDON *April 21, 1863.*



THE poems that follow are printed in the order of their publication. \*The first piece in the series I acknowledge and retain with extreme repugnance, indeed purely of necessity; for not long ago I inspected one, and am certified of the existence of other transcripts, intended sooner or later to be published abroad: by forestalling these, I can at least correct some misprints (no syllable is changed) and introduce a boyish work by an exculpatory word. The thing was my earliest attempt at "poetry always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine," which I have since written according to a scheme less extravagant and scale less impracticable than were ventured upon in this crude preliminary sketch—a sketch that, on reviewal, appears not altogether wide of some hint of the characteristic features of that particular *dramatis persona* it would fain have reproduced: good draughtsmanship, however, and right handling were far beyond the artist at that time.

R. B.

LONDON : December 25, 1867.

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I preserve, in order to supplement it, the foregoing preface. I had thought, when compelled to include in

my collected works the poem to which it refers, that the honest course would be to reprint, and leave mere literary errors unaltered. Twenty years' endurance of an eyesore seems more than sufficient: my faults remain duly recorded against me, and I claim permission to somewhat diminish these, so far as style is concerned, in the present and final edition where "Pauline" must needs, first of my performances, confront the reader. I have simply removed solecisms, mended the metre a little, and endeavoured to strengthen the phraseology—experience helping, in some degree, the helplessness of juvenile haste and heat in their untried adventure long ago.

The poems that follow are again, as before, printed in chronological order; but only so far as proves compatible with the prescribed size of each volume, which necessitates an occasional change in the distribution of its contents. Every date is subjoined as before.

R. B.

LONDON: *February 27, 1888.*

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P A U L I N E;  
A FRAGMENT OF A CONFESSION.

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Plus ne suis ce que j'ai été,  
Et ne le scaurois jamais être.—MAROT.

NON dubito, quin titulus libri nostri iaritate sua quamplurimos allicit ad legendum . inter quos nonnulli obliquæ opinionis, mente languidi, multi etiam maligni, et in ingenium nostrum ingrati accident, qui temeraria sua ignorantia, vix conspecto titulo clamabunt Nos vetita docere, hæresium semina jaccere . prius autibus offendiculo, præclaris ingeniis scandalo esse: . . . adeo conscientiæ suæ consulentes, ut nec Apollo, nec Musæ omnes, neque Angelus de cœlo me ab illorum execratione vindicare queant: quibus et ego nunc consulo, ne scripta nostra legant, nec intelligent, nec meminerint: nam noxia sunt. venenosas sunt: Acherontis ostium est in hoc libro, lapides loquuntur, caveant, ne cerebrum illis excutiat. Vos autem, qui æqua mente ad legendum venitus, si tantam prudentiæ discretionem adhibueritis, quantam in melle legendi apes, jam securi legite. Puto namque vos et utilitatis haud parum et voluptatis plurimum accepturos. Quod si qua repereritis, quæ vobis non placent, mittite illa, nee utimini. NAM ET EGO VOBIS ILLA NON PRONO, SED NARRO. Creterea tamen propterea non respuite . . . Ideo, si quid liberius dictum sit, ignoscite adolescentiæ nostræ, qui minor quam adolescens hoc opus composui.—*Hen. Corn. Agrippa, De Occult. Philosoph. in Praefat.*

LONDON : January 1833.  
V. A. XX.

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[This introduction would appear less absurdly pretentious did it apply, as was intended, to a completed structure of which the poem was meant for only a beginning and remains a fragment.]

## P A U L I N E.

1833.

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PAULINE, mine own, bend o'er me—thy soft breast  
Shall pant to mine—bend o'er me—thy sweet eyes,  
And loosened hair and breathing lips, and arms  
Drawing me to thee—these build up a screen  
To shut me in with thee, and from all fear ;  
So that I might unlock the sleepless brood  
Of fancies from my soul, their lurking-place,  
Nor doubt that each would pass, ne'er to return  
To one so watched, so loved and so secured.  
But what can guard thee but thy naked love ?  
Ah dearest, whoso sucks a poisoned wound  
Envenoms his own veins ! Thou art so good,  
So calm—if thou shouldst wear a brow less light  
For some wild thought which, but for me, were kept  
From out thy soul as from a sacred star !  
Yet till I have unlocked them it were vain  
To hope to sing ; some woe would light on me ;

Nature would point at one whose quivering lip  
Was bathed in her enchantments, whose brow burned  
Beneath the crown to which her secrets knelt,  
Who learned the spell which can call up the dead,  
And then departed smiling like a fiend  
Who has deceived God,—if such one shoulū seek  
Again her altars and stand robed and crowned  
Amid the faithful ! Sad confession first,  
Remorse and pardon and old claims renewed,  
Ere I can be—as I shall be no more.

I had been spared this shame if I had sat  
By thee for ever from the first, in place  
Of my wild dreams of beauty and of good,  
Or with them, as an earnest of their truth :  
No thought nor hope having been shut from thee,  
No vague wish unexplained, no wandering aim  
Sent back to bind on fancy's wings and seek  
Some strange fair world where it might be a law ;  
But, doubting nothing, had been led by thee,  
Thro' youth, and saved, as one at length awaked  
Who has slept through a peril. Ah vain, vain !

Thou lovest me ; the past is in its grave  
Tho' its ghost haunts us ; still this much is ours,  
To cast away restraint, lest a worse thing

Wait for us in the dark. Thou lovest me ;  
And thou art to receive not love but faith,  
For which thou wilt be mine, and smile and take  
All shapes and shames, and veil without a fear  
That form which music follows like a slave :  
And I look to thee and I trust in thee,  
As in a Northern night one looks alway  
Unto the East for morn and spring and joy.  
Thou seest then my aimless, hopeless state,  
And, resting on some few old feelings won  
Back by thy beauty, wouldst that I essay  
The task which was to me what now thou art :  
And why should I conceal one weakness more?

Thou wilt remember one warm morn when winter  
Crept aged from the earth, and spring's first breath  
Blew soft from the moist hills ; the black-thorn boughs,  
So dark in the bare wood, when glistening  
In the sunshine were white with coming buds,  
Like the bright side of a sorrow, and the banks  
Had violets opening from sleep like eyes.  
I walked with thee who knew'st not a deep shame  
Lurked beneath smiles and careless words which sought  
To hide it till they wandered and were mute,  
As we stood listening on a sunny mound  
To the wind murmuring in the damp copse,

Like heavy breathings of some hidden thing  
Betrayed by sleep ; until the feeling iushed  
That I was low indeed, yet not so low  
As to endure the calmness of thine eys.  
And so I told thee all, while the cool breast  
I leaned on altered not its quiet beating :  
And long ere words like a hurt bird's complaint  
Bade me loek up and be what I had been,  
I felt despair could never live by thee :  
Thou wilt remember. Thou art not more dear  
Than song was once to me ; and I ne'er sung  
But as one entering bright halls where all  
Will rise and shout for him : sure I must own  
That I am fallen, having chosen gifts  
Distinct from theirs—that I am sad and fain  
Would give up all to be but where I was,  
Not high as I had been if faithful found,  
But low and weak yet full of hope, and sure  
Of goodness as of life—that I would lose  
All this gay mastery of mind, to sit  
Once more with them, trusting in truth and love  
And with an aim—not being what I am.

Oh Pauline, I am ruined who believed  
That though my soul had floated from its sphere  
Of wild dominion into the dim orb

Of self—that it was strong and free as ever !  
It has conformed itself to that dim orb,  
Reflecting all its shades and shapes, and now  
Must stay where it alone can be adored.  
I have felt this in dreams—in dreams in which  
I seemed the fate from which I fled ; I felt  
A strange delight in causing my decay.  
I was a fiend in darkness chained for ever  
Within some ocean-cave ; and ages rolled,  
Till through the cleft rock, like a moonbeam, came  
A white swan to remain with me , and ages  
Rolled, yet I tired not of my first free joy  
In gazing on the peace of its pure wings :  
And then I said “ It is most fair to me,  
“ Yet its soft wings must sure have suffered change  
“ From the thick darkness, sure its eyes are dim,  
“ Its silver pinions must be cramped and numbed  
“ With sleeping ages here ; it cannot leave me,  
“ For it would seem, in light beside its kind,  
“ Withered, tho’ here to me most beautiful.”  
And then I was a young witch whose blue eyes,  
As she stood naked by the river springs,  
Drew down a god : I watched his radiant form  
•Growing less radiant, and it gladdened me ;  
Till one morn, as he sat in the sunshine  
Upon my knees, singing to me of heaven,

He turned to look at me, ere I could lose  
The grin with which I viewed his perishing :  
And he shrieked and departed and sat long  
By his deserted throne, but sunk at last  
Murmuring, as I kissed his lips and curled  
Around him, "I am still a god -- to thee."

Still I can lay my soul bare in its fall,  
Since all the wandering and all the weakness  
Will be a saddest comment on the song :  
And if, that done, I can be young again,  
I will give up all gained, as willingly  
As one gives up a charm which shuts him out  
From hope or part or care in human kind.  
As life wanes, all its care and strife and toil  
Seem strangely valueless, while the old trees  
Which grew by our youth's home, the waving mass  
Of climbing plants heavy with bloom and dew,  
The morning swallows with their songs like words,  
All these seem clear and only worth our thoughts :  
So, aught connected with my early life,  
My rude songs or my wild imaginings,  
How I look on them-- most distinct amid  
The fever and the stir of after years !

I ne'er had ventured e'en to hope for this,

Had not the glow I felt at His award,  
Assured me all was not extinct within :  
His whom all honour, whose renown springs up  
Like sunlight which will visit all the world,  
So that e'en they who sneered at him at first,  
Come ~~out~~ to it, as some dark spider crawls  
From his foul nets which some lit torch invades,  
Yet spinning still new films for his retreat.  
Thou didst smile, poet, but can we forgive?

✓ Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever !  
Thou art gone from us ; years go by and spring  
Gladdens and the young earth is beautiful,  
Yet thy songs come not, other bards arise,  
But none like thee : they stand, thy majesties,  
Like mighty works which tell some spirit there  
Hath sat regardless of neglect and scorn,  
Till, its long task completed, it hath risen  
And left us, never to return, and all  
Rush in to peer and praise when all in vain.  
The air seems bright with thy past presence yet,  
But thou art still for me as thou hast been  
When I have stood with thee as on a <sup>throne</sup>  
With all thy dim creations gathered round  
Like mountains, and I felt of mould like them,  
And with them creatures of my own were mixed,

Like things half-lived, catching and giving life.  
But thou art still for me who have adored '  
Tho' single, panting but to hear thy name  
Which I believed a spell to me alone,  
Scarce deeming thou wast as a star to men !  
As one should worship long a sacred spring '  
Scarce worth a moth's flitting, which long grasses cross,  
And one small tree embowers droopingly—  
Joying to see some wandering insect won  
To live in its few rushes, or some locust  
To pasture on its boughs, or some wild bird  
Stoop for its freshness from the trackless air :  
And then should find it but the fountain-head,  
Long lost, of some great river washing towns  
And towers, and seeing old woods which will live  
But by its banks untrod of human foot,  
Which, when the great sun sinks, lie quivering  
In light as some thing lieth half of life  
Before God's foot, waiting a wondrous change ;  
Then girt with rocks which seek to turn or stay  
Its course in vain, for it does ever spread  
Like a sea's arm as it goes rolling on,  
Being the pulse of some great country—so  
Wast thou to me, and art thou to the world !  
And I, perchance, half feel a strange regret  
That I am not what I have been to thee :

Like a girl one has silently loved long  
In her first loneliness in some retreat,  
When, late emerged, all gaze and glow to view  
Her fresh eyes and soft hair and lips which bloom  
Like a mountain berry : doubtless it is sweet  
To see her thus adored, but there have been  
Moments when all the world was in our praise,  
Sweeter than any pride of after hours.  
Yet, sun-treader, all hail ! From my heart's heart  
I bid thee hail ! E'en in my wildest dreams,  
I proudly feel I would have thrown to dust  
The wreaths of fame which seemed o'erhanging me,  
To see thee for a moment as thou art.

And if thou livest, if thou lovest, spirit !  
Remember me who set this final seal  
To wandering thought—that one so pure as thou  
Could never die. Remember me who flung  
All honour from my soul, yet paused and said  
“There is one spark of love remaining yet,  
“For I have nought in common with him, shapes  
“Which followed him avoid me, and foul forms  
“Seek me, which ne'er could fasten on his mind ;  
“And though I feel how low I am to him,  
“Yet I aim not even to catch a tone  
“Of harmonies he called profusely up ;

"So, one gleam still remains, although the last."  
Remember me who praise thee e'en with tears,  
For never more shall I walk calm with thee;  
Thy sweet imaginings are as an air,  
A melody some wondrous singer sings,  
Which, though it haunt men oft in the still eve,  
They dream not to essay; yet it no less  
But more is honoured. I was thine in shame,  
And now when all thy proud renown is out,  
I am a watcher whose eyes have grown dim  
With looking for some star which breaks on him  
Altered and worn and weak and full of tears.

Autumn has come like spring returned to us,  
Won from her girlishness; like one returned  
A friend that was a lover, nor forgets  
The first warm love, but full of sober thoughts  
Of fading years; whose soft mouth quivers yet  
With the old smile, but yet so changed and still!  
And here am I the scoffer, who have probed  
Life's vanity, won by a word again  
Into my own life—by one little word  
Of this sweet friend who lives in loving me,  
Lives strangely on my thoughts and looks and words,  
As fathoms down some nameless ocean thing  
Its silent course of quietness and joy.

O dearest, if indeed I tell the past,  
May'st thou forget it as a sad sick dream !  
Or if it linger—my lost soul too soon  
Sinks to itself and whispers we shall be  
But closer linked, two creatures whom the earth  
Bears singly, with strange feelings unrevealed  
Save to each other ; or two lonely things  
Created by some power whose reign is done,  
Having no part in God or his bright world.  
I am to sing whilst ebbing day dies soft,  
As a lean scholar dies worn o'er his book,  
And in the heaven stars steal out one by one  
As hunted men steal to their mountain watch.  
I must not think, lest this new impulse die  
In which I trust ; I have no confidence :  
So, I will sing on fast as fancies come ;  
Rudely, the verse being as the mood it paints

I strip my mind bare, whose first elements  
I shall unveil—not as they struggled forth  
In infancy, nor as they now exist,  
When I am grown above them and can rule—  
But in that middle stage when they were full  
Yet ere I had disposed them to my will ;  
And then I shall show how these elements  
Produced my present state, and what it is.

I am made up of an intensest life,  
Of a most clear idea of consciousness  
Of self, distinct from all its qualities,  
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers ,  
And thus far it exists, if tracked, in all :  
But linked, in me, to self-supremacy,      ^  
Existing as a centre to all things,  
Most potent to create and rule and call  
Upon all things to minister to it ;  
And to a principle of restlessness  
Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all—  
This is myself ; and I should thus have been  
Though gifted lower than the meanest soul.

And of my powers, one springs up to save  
From utter death a soul with such desire  
Confined to clay—of powers the only one  
Which marks me—an imagination which  
Has been a very angel, coming not  
In fitful visions but beside me ever  
And never failing me ; so, though my mind  
Forgets not, not a shred of life forgets,  
Yet I can take a secret pride in calling  
The dark past up to quell it regally.

A mind like this must dissipate itself.

But I have always had one lode-star ; now,  
As I look back, I see that I have halted  
Or hastened as I looked towards that star—  
A need, a trust, a yearning after God :  
A feeling I have analysed but late,  
But it existed, and was reconciled  
With a neglect of all I deemed his laws,  
Which yet, when seen in others, I abhorred.  
I felt as one beloved, and so shut in  
From fear : and thence I date my trust in signs  
And omens, for I saw God everywhere ;  
And I can only lay it to the fruit  
Of a sad after-time that I could doubt  
Even his being—e'en the while I felt  
His presence, never acted from myself,  
Still trusted in a hand to lead me through  
All danger ; and this feeling ever fought  
Against my weakest reason and resolve.

And I can love nothing—and this dull truth  
Has come the last : but sense supplies a love  
Encircling me and mingling with my life.

These make myself : I have long sought in vain  
To trace how they were formed by circumstance,  
Yet ever found them mould my wildest youth

Where they alone displayed themselves, converted  
All objects to their use : now see their course !

They came to me in my first dawn of life  
Which passed alone with wisest ancient books  
All halo-girt with fancies of my own ;  
And I myself went with the tale—a god  
Wandering after beauty, or a giant  
Standing vast in the sunset—an old hunter  
Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief  
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos.  
I tell you, nought has ever been so clear  
As the place, the time, the fashion of those lives :  
I had not seen a work of lofty art,  
Nor woman's beauty nor sweet nature's face,  
Yet, I say, never morn broke clear as those  
On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,  
The deep groves and white temples and wet caves  
And nothing ever will surprise me now—  
Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,  
Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair.

And strange it is that I who could so dream  
Should e'er have stooped to aim at aught beneath—  
Aught low or painful ; but I never doubted :  
So, as I grew, I rudely shaped my life

To my immediate wants ; yet strong beneath  
Was a vague sense of power though folded up—  
A sense that, though those shades and times were past,  
Their spirit dwelt in me, with them should rule.

Then came a pause, and long restraint chained down  
My soul till it was changed. I lost myself,  
And were it not that I so loathe that loss,  
I could recall how first I learned to turn  
My mind against itself ; and the effects  
In deeds for which remorse were vain as for  
The wanderings of delirious dream ; yet thence  
Came cunning, envy, falsehood, all world's wrong  
That spotted me : at length I cleansed my soul.  
Yet long world's influence remained ; and nought  
But the still life I led, apart once more,  
Which left me free to seek soul's old delights,  
Could e'er have brought me thus far back to peace.

As peace returned, I sought out some pursuit ;  
And song rose, no new impulse but the one  
With which all others best could be combined.  
My life has not been that of those whose heaven  
Was lampless save where poesy shone out ;  
But as a clime where glittering mountain-tops  
And glancing sea and forests steeped in light

Give back reflected the far-flashing sun ;  
For music (which is earnest of a heaven,  
Seeing we know emotions strange by it,  
Not else to be revealed,) is like a voice,  
A low voice calling fancy, as a friend,  
To the green woods in the gay summer time :  
And she fills all the way with dancing shapes  
Which have made painters pale, and they go on  
Till stars look at them and winds call to them  
As they leave life's path for the twilight world  
Where the dead gather. This was not at first,  
For I scarce knew what I would do. I had  
An impulse but no yearning—only sang.

And first I sang as I in dream have seen  
Music wait on a lyrist for some thought,  
Yet singing to herself until it came.  
I turned to those old times and scenes where all  
That's beautiful had birth for me, and made  
Rude verses on them all ; and then I paused—  
I had done nothing, so I sought to know  
What other minds achieved. No fear outbreake  
As on the works of mighty bards I gazed,  
In the first joy at finding my own thoughts  
Recorded, my own fancies justified,  
And their aspirations but my very own.

With them I first explored passion and mind,—  
All to begin afresh ! I rather sought  
To rival what I wondered at than form  
Creations of my own ; if much was light  
Lent by the others, much was yet my own.

I paused again : 'a change was coming—came :  
I was no more a boy, the past was breaking  
Before the future and like fever worked.  
I thought on my new self, and all my powers  
Burst out. I dreamed not of restraint, but gazed  
On all things : schemes and systems went and came,  
And I was proud (being vainest of the weak)  
In wandering o'er thought's world to seek some one  
To be my prize, as if you wandered o'er  
The White Way for a star.

And my choice fell

Not so much on a system as a man—  
On one, whom praise of mine shall not offend,  
Who was as calm as beauty, being such  
Unto mankind as thou to me, Pauline,—  
Believing in them and devoting all  
His soul's strength to their winning back to peace ;  
Who sent forth hopes and longings for their sake,  
Clothed in all passion's melodies : such first

Caught me and set me, slave of a sweet task,  
To disentangle, gather sense from song :  
Since, song-inwoven, lurked there words which seemed  
A key to a new world, the muttering  
Of angels, something yet unguessed by man.  
How my heart leapt as still I sought and found  
Much there, I felt my own soul had conceived,  
But there living and burning ! Soon the orb  
Of his conceptions dawned on me ; its praise  
Lives in the tongues of men, men's brows are high  
When his name means a triumph and a pride,  
So, my weak voice may well forbear to shame  
What seemed decreed my fate : I threw myself  
To meet it, I was vowed to liberty,  
Men were to be as gods and earth as heaven,  
And I—ah, what a life was mine to prove !  
My whole soul rose to meet it. Now, Pauline,  
I shall go mad, if I recall that time !

Oh let me look back ere I leave for ever  
The time which was an hour one fondly waits  
For a fair girl that comes a withered hag !  
And I was lonely, far from woods and fields,  
And amid dullest sights, who should be loose  
As a stag ; yet I was full of bliss, who lived  
With Plato and who had the key to life ;

And I had dimly shaped my first attempt,  
And many a thought did I build up on thought,  
As the wild bee hangs cell to cell ; in vain,  
For I must still advance, no rest for mind.

'Twas in my plan to look on real life,  
The life all new to me ; my theories  
Were firm, so them I left, to look and learn  
Mankind, its cares, hopes, fears, its woes and joys ;  
And, as I pondered on their ways, I sought  
How best life's end might be attained—an end  
Comprising every joy. I deeply mused.

And suddenly without heart-wreck I awoke  
As from a dream : I said " 'Twas beautiful,  
" Yet but a dream, and so adieu to it ! "

As some world-wanderer sees in a far meadow  
Strange towers and high-walled gardens thick with trees,  
Where song takes shelter and delicious mirth  
From laughing fairy creatures peeping over,  
And on the morrow when he comes to lie  
For ever 'neath those garden-trees fruit-flushed  
Sung round by fairies, all his search is vain.  
First went my hopes of perfecting mankind,  
Next—faith in them, and then in freedom's self  
And virtue's self, then my own motives, ends

And aims and loves, and human love went last.  
I felt this no decay, because new powers  
Rose as old feelings left—wit, mockery,  
Light-heartedness ; for I had oft been sad,  
Mistrusting my resolves, but now I cast  
Hope joyously away : I laughed and said  
“No more of this !” I must not think : at length  
I looked again to see if all went well.

My powers were greater : as some temple seemed  
My soul, where nought is changed and incense rolls  
Around the altar, only God is gone  
And some dark spirit sitteth in his seat.  
So, I passed through the temple and to me  
Knelt troops of shadows, and they cried “Hail, king !  
“We serve thee now and thou shalt serve no more !  
“Call on us, prove us, let us worship thee !”  
And I said “Are ye strong ? Let fancy bear me  
“Far from the past !” And I was borne away,  
As Arab birds float sleeping in the wind,  
O'er deserts, towers and forests, I being calm.  
And I said “I have nursed up energies,  
“They will prey on me.” And a band knelt low  
And cried “Lord, we are here and we will make  
“Safe way for thee in thine appointed life !  
“But look on us !” And I said “Ye will worship

“ Me ; should my heart not worship too?” They shouted  
“ Thyself, thou’ art our king !” So, I stood there  
Smiling—oh, vanity of vanities !  
For buoyant and rejoicing was the spirit  
With which I looked out how to end my course ;  
I felt once more myself, my powers—all mine ;  
I knew while youth and health so lifted me  
That, spite of all life’s nothingness, no grief  
Came nigh me, I must ever be light-hearted ;  
And that this knowledge was the only veil  
Betwixt joy and despair : so, if age came,  
I should be left—a wreck linked to a soul  
Yet fluttering, or mind-broken and aware  
Of my decay. So a long summer morn  
Found me ; and ere noon came, I had resolved  
No age should come on me ere youth was spent,  
For I would wear myself out, like that morn  
Which wasted not a sunbeam ; every hour  
I would make mine, and die.

And thus I sought

To chain my spirit down which erst I freed  
For flights to fame : I said “ The troubled life  
“ Of genius, seen so gay when working forth  
“ Some trusted end, grows sad when all proves vain—  
“ How sad when men have parted with truth’s peace

“For falsest fancy’s sake, which waited first  
“As an obedient spirit when delight  
“Came without fancy’s call : but alters soon,  
“Comes darkened, seldom, hastens to depart,  
“Leaving a heavy darkness and warm tears.  
“But I shall never lose her ; she will live  
“Dearer for such seclusion. I but catch  
“A hue, a glance of what I sing : so, pain  
“Is linked with pleasure, for I ne’er may tell  
“Half the bright sights which dazzle me ; but now  
“Mine shall be all the radiance : let them fade  
“Untold—others shall rise as fair, as fast !  
“And when all’s done, the few dim gleams transferred,—  
(For a new thought sprang up how well it were,  
Discarding shadowy hope, to weave such lays  
As straight encircle men with praise and love,  
So, I should not die utterly,—should bring  
One branch from the gold forest, like the knight  
Of old tales, witnessing I had been there)—  
“And when all’s done, how vain seems e’en success—  
“The vaunted influence poets have o’er men !  
“T is a fine thing that one weak as myself  
Should sit in his lone room, knowing the words  
“He utters in his solitude shall move  
“Men like a swift wind—that tho’ dead and gone,  
“New eyes shall glisten when his beauteous dreams

“Of love come true in happier frames than his.  
“Ay, the still night brings thoughts like these, but morn  
“Comes and the mockery again laughs out  
“At hollow praises, smiles allied to sneers;  
“And my soul’s idol ever whispers me  
“To dwell with him and his unhonoured song:  
“And I foreknow my spirit, that would press  
“First in the struggle, fail again to make  
“All bow enslaved, and I again should sink.

“And then know that this curse will come on us,  
“To see our idols perish; we may wither,  
“No marvel, we are clay, but our low fate  
“Should not extend to those whom trustingly  
“We sent before into time’s yawning gulf  
“To face what dread may lurk in darkness there.  
“To find the painter’s glory pass, and feel  
“Music can move us not as once, or, worst,  
“To weep decaying wits ere the frail body  
“Decays! Nought makes me trust some love is true,  
“But the delight of the contented lowness  
“With which I gaze on him I keep for ever  
“Above me; I to rise and rival him?  
“Feed his fame rather from my heart’s best blood,  
“Wither unseen that he may flourish still.”

Pauline, my soul's friend, thou dost pity yet  
How this mood swayed me when that soul found thine,  
When I had set myself to live this life,  
Defying all past glory. Ere thou camest  
I seemed defiant, sweet, for old delights  
Had flocked like birds again ; music, my life,  
Nourished me more than ever ; then the lore  
Loved for itself and all it shows—that king  
Treading the purple calmly to his death,  
While round him, like the clouds of eve, all dusk,  
The giant shades of fate, silently flitting,  
Pile the dim outline of the coming doom ;  
And him sitting alone in blood while friends  
Are hunting far in the sunshine ; and the boy  
With his white breast and brow and clustering curls  
Streaked with his mother's blood, but striving hard  
To tell his story ere his reason goes.  
And when I loved thee as love seemed so oft,  
Thou lovedst me indeed : I wondering searched  
My heart to find some feeling like such love,  
Believing I was still much I had been.  
Too soon I found all faith had gone from me,  
And the late glow of life, like change on clouds,  
Proved not the morn-blush widening into day,  
But eve faint-coloured by the dying sun  
While darkness hastens quickly. I will tell

My state as though 'twere none of mine—despair  
Cannot come near us—this it is, my state.

•

Souls alter not, and mine must still advance ;  
Strange that I knew not, when I flung away  
My youth's chief aims, their loss might lead to loss  
Of what few I retained, and no resource  
Be left me : for behold how changed is all !  
I cannot chain my soul : it will not rest  
In its clay prison, this most narrow sphere :  
It has strange impulse, tendency, desire,  
Which nowise I account for nor explain,  
But cannot stifle, being bound to trust  
All feelings equally, to hear all sides :  
How can my life indulge them ? yet they live,  
Referring to some state of life unknown.

My selfishness is satiated not,  
It wears me like a flame ; my hunger for  
All pleasure, howsoe'er minute, grows pain ;  
I envy—how I envy him whose soul  
Turns its whole energies to some one end,  
To elevate an aim, pursue success  
However mean ! So, my still baffled hope  
Seeks out abstractions ; I would have one joy,  
But one in life, so it were wholly mine,

One rapture all my soul could fill : and this  
Wild feeling places me in dream afar  
In some vast country where the eye can see  
No end to the far hills and dales bestrewn  
With shining towers and towns, till I grow mad  
Well-nigh, to know not one abode but holds  
Some pleasure, while my soul could grasp the world,  
But must remain this vile form's slave. I look  
With hope to age at last, which quenching much,  
May let me concentrate what sparks it spares.

This restlessness of passion meets in me  
A craving after knowledge : the sole proof  
Of yet commanding will is in that power  
Repressed ; for I beheld it in its dawn,  
The sleepless harpy with just-budding wings,  
And I considered whether to forego  
All happy ignorant hopes and fears, to live,  
Finding a recompense in its wild eyes.  
And when I found that I should perish so,  
I bade its wild eyes close from me for ever,  
And I am left alone with old delights ;  
See ! it lies in me a chained thing, still prompt  
To serve me if I loose its slightest bond :  
I cannot but be proud of my bright slave.

How should this earth's life prove my only sphere?  
Can I so narrow sense but that in life  
Soul still exceeds it? In their elements  
My love outsoars my reason; but since love  
Perforce receives its object from this earth  
While reason wanders chainless, the few truths  
Caught from its wanderings have sufficed to quell  
Love chained below; then what were love, set free,  
Which, with the object it demands, would pass  
Reason companioning the seraphim?  
No, what I feel may pass all human love  
Yet fall far short of what my love should be.  
And yet I seem more warped in this than aught,  
Myself stands out more hideously: of old  
I could forget myself in friendship, fame,  
Liberty, nay, in love of mightier souls;  
But I begin to know what thing hate is—  
To sicken and to quiver and grow white—  
And I myself have furnished its first prey.  
Hate of the weak and ever-wavering will,  
The selfishness, the still-decaying frame . . .  
But I must never grieve whom wing can waft  
Far from such thoughts—as now. Andromeda!  
And she is with me: years roll, I shall change,  
But change can touch her not—so beautiful  
With her fixed eyes, earnest and still, and hair

Lifted and spread by the salt-sweeping breeze,  
And one red beam, all the storm leaves in heaven,  
Resting upon her eyes and hair, such hair,  
As she awaits the snake on the wet beach  
By the dark rock and the white wave just breaking  
At her feet ; quite naked and alone ; a thing  
I doubt not, nor fear for, secure some god  
To save will come in thunder from the stars.  
Let it pass ! Soul requires another change.  
I will be gifted with a wondrous mind,  
Yet sunk by error to men's sympathy,  
And in the wane of life, yet only so  
As to call up their fears ; and there shall come  
A time requiring youth's best energies ;  
And lo, I fling age, sorrow, sickness off,  
And rise triumphant, triumph through decay.

And thus it is that I supply the chasm  
'Twixt what I am and all I fain would be :  
But then to know nothing, to hope for nothing,  
To seize on life's dull joys from a strange fear  
Lest, losing them, all 's lost and nought remains !

There 's some vile juggle with my reason here ;  
I feel I but explain to my own loss  
These impulses : they live no less the same.

Liberty ! what though I despair? my blood  
Rose never at a slave's name proud as now.  
Oh sympathies, obscured by sophistries !—  
Why else have I sought refuge in myself,  
But from the woes I saw and could not stay?  
Love ! Is not this to love thee, my Pauline?  
I cherish prejudice, lest I be left  
Utterly loveless? witness my belief  
In poets, though sad change has come there too ;  
No more I leave myself to follow them—  
Unconsciously I measure me by them—  
Let me forget it : and I cherish most  
My love of England—how her name, a word  
Of hers in a strange tongue makes my heart beat !

Pauline, could I but break the spell ! Not now—  
All's fever—but when calm shall come again,  
I am prepared : I have made life my own.  
I would not be content with all the change  
One frame should feel, but I have gone in thought  
Thro' all conjuncture, I have lived all life  
When it is most alive, where strangest fate  
New-shapes it past surmise—the throes of men  
Bit by some curse or in the grasps of doom  
Half-visible and still-increasing round,  
Or crowning their wide being's general aim.

These are wild fancies, but I feel, sweet friend,  
As one breathing his weakness to the ear  
Of pitying angel—dear as a winter flower,  
A slight flower growing alone, and offering  
Its frail cup of three leaves to the cold sun,  
Yet joyous and confiding like the triumph  
Of a child : and why am I not worthy thee?  
I can live all the life of plants, and gaze  
Drowsily on the bees that flit and play,  
Or bare my breast for sunbeams which will kill,  
Or open in the night of sounds, to look  
For the dim stars ; I can mount with the bird  
Leaping airily his pyramid of leaves  
And twisted boughs of some tall mountain tree,  
Or rise cheerfully springing to the heavens ;  
Or like a fish breathe deep the morning air  
In the misty sun-warm water ; or with flower  
And tree can smile in light at the sinking sun  
Just as the storm comes, as a girl would look  
On a departing lover—most serene.

Pauline, come with me, see how I could build  
A home for us, out of the world, in thought !  
I am uplifted : fly with me, Pauline !

Night, and one single ridge of narrow path

Between the sullen river and the woods  
Waving and muttering, for the moonless night  
Has shaped them into images of life,  
Like the uprising of the giant-ghosts,  
Looking on earth to know how their sons fare :  
Thou art so close by me, the roughest swell  
Of wind in the tree-tops hides not the panting  
Of thy soft breasts. No, we will pass to morning—  
Morning, the rocks and valleys and old woods.  
How the sun brightens in the mist, and here,  
Half in the air, like creatures of the place,  
Trusting the element, living on high boughs  
That swing in the wind—look at the silver spray  
Flung from the foam-sheet of the cataract  
Amid the broken rocks! Shall we stay here  
With the wild hawks? No, ere the hot noon come,  
Dive we down—safe! See this our new retreat  
Walled in with a sloped mound of matted shrubs,  
Dark, tangled, old and green, still sloping down  
To a small pool whose waters lie asleep  
Amid the trailing boughs turned water-plants :  
And tall trees overarch to keep us in,  
Breaking the sunbeams into emerald shafts,  
And in the dreamy water one small group  
Of two or three strange trees are got together  
Wondering at all around, as strange beasts herd

Together far from their own land : all wildness,  
No turf nor moss, for boughs and plants pave all,  
And tongues of bank go shelving in the lymph,  
Where the pale-throated snake reclines his head,  
And old grey stones lie making eddies there,  
The wild-mice cross them dry-shod. Deeper in !  
Shut thy soft eyes—now look—still deeper in !  
This is the very heart of the woods all round  
Mountain-like heaped above us ; yet even here  
One pond of water gleams ; far off the river  
Sweeps like a sea, barred out from land ; but one—  
One thin clear sheet has overleaped and wound  
Into this silent depth, which gained, it lies  
Still, as but let by sufferance ; the trees bend  
O'er it as wild men watch a sleeping girl,  
And through their roots long creeping plants out-stretch  
Their twined hair, steeped and sparkling ; farther on,  
Tall rushes and thick flag-knots have combined  
To narrow it ; so, at length, a silver thread,  
It winds, all noiselessly through the deep wood  
Till thro' a cleft-way, thro' the moss and stone,  
It joins its parent-river with a shout.

Up for the glowing day, leave the old woods !  
See, they part, like a ruined arch : the sky !  
Nothing but sky appears, so close the roots

And grass of the hill-top level with the air—  
Blue sunny air, where a great cloud floats laden  
With light, like a dead whale that white birds pick,  
Floating away in the sun in some north sea.  
Air, air, fresh life-blood, thin and searching air,  
The clear, dear breath of God that loveth us,  
Where small birds reel and winds take their delight !  
Water is beautiful, but not like air :  
See, where the solid azure waters lie  
Made as of thickened air, and down below,  
The fern-ranks like a forest spread themselves  
As though each pore could feel the element ;  
Where the quick glancing serpent winds his way,  
Float with me there, Pauline !—but not like air.

Down the hill ! Stop—a clump of trees, see. set  
On a heap of rock, which look o'er the far plain :  
So, envious climbing shrubs would mount to rest  
And peer from their spread boughs ; wide they wave,  
    looking  
At the muleteers who whistle on their way,  
To the merry chime of morning bells, past all  
The little smoking cots, mid fields and banks  
And copses bright in the sun. My spirit wanders :  
Hedgerows for me—those living hedgerows where  
The bushes close and clasp above and keep

Thought in—I am concentrated—I feel ;  
But my soul saddens when it looks beyond :  
I cannot be immortal, taste all joy.

O God, where do they tend—these struggling aims ? \*  
What would I have ? What is this “sleep” which  
seems

\* Je crains bien que mon pauvre ami ne soit pas toujours parfaitement compris dans ce qui reste à lire de cet étrange fragment, mais il est moins propre que tout autre à éclaircir ce qui de sa nature ne peut jamais être que songe et confusion. D'ailleurs je ne sais trop si en cherchant à mieux co-ordonner certaines parties l'on ne courrait pas le risque de nuire au seul mérite auquel une production si singulière peut prétendre, celui de donner une idée assez précise du genre qu'elle n'a fait qu'ébaucher. Ce début sans prétention, ce remuement des passions qui va d'abord en accroissant et puis s'apaise par degrés, ces élans de l'âme, ce retour soudain sur soi-même, et par-dessus tout, la tournure d'esprit tout particulière de mon ami, rendent les changemens presque impossibles. Les raisons qu'il fait valor ailleurs, et d'autres encore plus puissantes, ont fait trouver grâce à mes yeux pour cet écrit qu'autrement je lui eusse conseillé de jeter au feu. Je n'en crois pas moins au grand principe de toute composition—à ce principe de Shakespeare, de Rafaëlle, de Beethoven, d'où il suit que la concentration des idées est due bien plus à leur conception qu'à leur mise en exécution. J'ai tout lieu de craindre que la première de ces qualités ne soit encore étrangère à mon ami, et je doute fort qu'un redoulement de travail lui fasse acquérir la seconde. Le mieux serait de brûler ceci, mais que faire ?

Je crois que dans ce qui suit il fait allusion à un certain examen qu'il fit autrefois de l'âme, ou plutôt de son âme, pour découvrir la suite des objets auxquels il lui serait possible d'atteindre, et dont chacun une fois obtenu devait former une espèce de plateau d'où l'on pouvait apercevoir d'autres buts, d'autres projets, d'autres jouissances qui, à leur tour, devaient être surmontés. Il en résultait que l'oubli et le sommeil devaient tout terminer. Cette idée, que je ne sais pas parfaitement, lui est peut-être aussi inintelligible qu'à moi.

PAULINE.

To bound all? can there be a “waking” point  
Of crowning life? The soul would never rule;  
It would be first in all things, it would have  
Its utmost pleasure filled, but, that complete,  
Commanding, for commanding, sickens it.  
The last point I can trace is—rest beneath  
Some better essence than itself, in weakness;  
This is “myself,” not what I think should be:  
And what is that I hunger for but God?

My God, my God, let me for once look on thee  
As though nought else existed, we alone!  
And as creation crumbles, my soul’s spark  
Expands till I can say,—Even from myself  
I need thee and I feel thee and I love thee.  
I do not plead my rapture in thy works  
For love of thee, nor that I feel as one  
Who cannot die: but there is that in me  
Which turns to thee, which loves or which should love.

Why have I girt myself with this hell-dress?  
Why have I laboured to put out my life?  
Is it not in my nature to adore,  
And e’en for all my reason do I not  
Feel him, and thank him, and pray to him—now?  
Can I forego the trust that he loves me?

Do I not feel a love which only ONE . . .  
O thou pale form, so dimly seen, deep-eyed !  
I have denied thee calmly—do I not  
Pant when I read of thy consummate power,  
And burn to see thy calm pure truths out-flash  
The brightest gleams of earth's philosophy ?  
Do I not shake to hear aught question thee ?  
If I am erring save me, madden me,  
Take from me powers and pleasures, let me die  
Ages, so I see thee ! I am knit round  
As with a charm by sin and lust and pride,  
Yet though my wandering dreams have seen all shapes  
Of strange delight, oft have I stood by thee—  
Have I been keeping lonely watch with thee  
In the damp night by weeping Olivet,  
Or leaning on thy bosom, proudly less,  
Or dying with thee on the lonely cross,  
Or witnessing thine outburst from the tomb.

A mortal, sin's familiar friend, doth here  
Avow that he will give all earth's reward,  
But to believe and humbly teach the faith,  
In suffering and poverty and shame,  
Only believing he is not unloved.

And now, my Pauline, I am thine for ever !

I feel the spirit which has buoyed me up  
Desert me, and old shades are gathering fast ;  
Yet while the last light waits, I would say much,  
This chiefly, it is gain that I have said  
Somewhat of love I ever felt for thee  
But seldom told ; our hearts so beat together  
That speech seemed mockery ; but when dark hours come,  
And joy departs, and thou, sweet, deem'st it strange  
A sorrow moves me, thou canst not remove,  
Look on this lay I dedicate to thee,  
Which through thee I began, which thus I end,  
Collecting the last gleams to strive to tell  
How I am thine, and more than ever now  
That I sink fast : yet though I deeper sink,  
No less song proves one word has brought me bliss,  
Another still may win bliss surely back.  
Thou knowest, dear, I could not think all calm,  
For fancies followed thought and bore me off,  
And left all indistinct ; ere one was caught  
Another glanced ; so, dazzled by my wealth,  
I knew not which to leave nor which to choose,  
For all so floated, nought was fixed and firm.  
And then thou said'st a perfect bard was one  
Who chronicled the stages of all life,  
And so thou bad'st me shadow this first stage.  
'T is done, and even now I recognize

The shift, the change from last to past—discern  
Faintly how life is truth and truth is good.  
And why thou must be mine is, that e'en now  
In the dim hush of night, that I have done,  
Despite the sad forebodings, love looks through—  
Whispers,—E'en at the last I have her still,  
With her delicious eyes as clear as heaven  
When rain in a quick shower has beat down mist,  
And clouds float white above like broods of swans.  
How the blood lies upon her cheek, outspread  
As thinned by kisses ! only in her lips  
It wells and pulses like a living thing,  
And her neck looks like marble misted o'er  
With love-breath,—a Pauline from heights above,  
Stooping beneath me, looking up—one look  
As I might kill her and be loved the more.

So, love me—me, Pauline, and nought but me,  
Never leave loving ! Words are wild and weak,  
Believe them not, Pauline ! I stained myself  
But to behold thee purer by my side,  
To show thou art my breath, my life, a last  
Resource, an extreme want : never believe  
Aught better could so look on thee ; nor seek  
Again the world of good thoughts left for mine !  
There were bright troops of undiscovered suns,

Each equal in their radiant course , there were  
Clusters of far fair isles which ocean kept  
For his own joy, and his waves broke on them  
Without a choice ; and there was a dim crowd  
Of visions, each a part of some grand whole :  
And one star left his peers and came with peace  
Upon a storm, and all eyes pined for him ;  
And one isle harboured a sea-beaten ship,  
And the crew wandered in its bowers and plucked  
Its fruits and gave up all their hopes of home ;  
And one dream came to a pale poet's sleep,  
And he said, " I am singled out by God,  
" No sin must touch me." Words are wild and weak,  
But what they would express is,—Leave me not,  
Still sit by me with beating breast and hair  
Loosened, be watching earnest by my side,  
Turning my books or kissing me when I  
Look up—like summer wind ! Be still to me  
A help to music's mystery which mind fails  
To fathom, its solution, no mere clue !  
O reason's pedantry, life's rule prescribed !  
I hopeless, I the loveless, hope and love.  
Wiser and better, know me now, not when  
You loved me as I was. Smile not ! I have  
Much yet to dawn on you, to gladden you.

No more of the past ! I'll look within no more.  
I have too trusted my own lawless wants,  
Too trusted my vain self, vague intuition—  
Draining soul's wine alone in the still night,  
And seeing how, as gathering films arose,  
As by an inspiration life seemed bare  
And grinning in its vanity, while ends  
Foul to be dreamed of, smiled at me as fixed  
And fair, while others changed from fair to foul  
As a young witch turns an old hag at night.  
No more of this ! We will go hand in hand,  
I with thee, even as a child—love's slave,  
Looking no farther than his liege commands.

And thou hast chosen where this life shall be :  
The land which gave me thee shall be our home,  
Where nature lies all wild amid her lakes  
And snow-swathed mountains and vast pines begirt  
With ropes of snow—where nature lies all bare,  
Suffering none to view her but a race  
Or stinted or deformed, like the mute dwarfs  
Which wait upon a naked Indian queen.  
And there (the time being when the heavens are thick  
With storm) I'll sit with thee while thou dost sing  
Thy native songs, gay as a desert bird  
Which crieth as it flies for perfect joy,

Or telling me old stories of dead knights ;  
Or I will read great lays to thee—how she,  
The fair pale sister, went to her chill grave  
With power to love and to be loved and live :  
Or we will go together, like twin gods  
Of the infernal world, with scented lamp  
Over the dead, to call and to awake,  
Over the unshaped images which lie  
Within my mind's cave : only leaving all,  
That tells of the past doubt So, when spring comes  
With sunshine back again like an old smile,  
And the fresh waters and awakened birds  
And budding woods await us, I shall be  
Prepared, and we will question life once more,  
Till its old sense shall come renewed by change,  
Like some clear thought which harsh words veiled before ;  
Feeling God loves us, and that all which errs  
Is but a dream which death will dissipate.  
And then what need of longer exile ? Seek  
My England, and, again there, calm approach  
All I once fled from, calmly look on those  
The works of my past weakness, as one views  
Some scene where danger met him long before.  
Ah that such pleasant life should be but dreamed !

But whate'er come of it, and though it fade,

And though ere the cold morning all be gone,  
As it may be ;—tho' music wait to wile,  
And strange eyes and bright wine lure, laugh like sin  
Which steals back softly on a soul half saved,  
And I the first deny, decry, despise,  
With this avowal, these intents so fair,—  
Still be it all my own, this moment's pride !  
No less I make an end in perfect joy.  
E'en in my brightest time, a lurking fear  
Possessed me : I well knew my weak resolves,  
I felt the witchery that makes mind sleep  
Over its treasure, as one half afraid  
To make his riches definite : but now  
These feelings shall not utterly be lost,  
I shall not know again that nameless care  
Lest, leaving all undone in youth, some new  
And undreamed end reveal itself too late :  
For this song shall remain to tell for ever  
That when I lost all hope of such a change,  
Suddenly beauty rose on me again.  
No less I make an end in perfect joy,  
For **I**, who thus again was visited,  
Shall doubt not many another bliss awaits,  
And, though this weak soul sink and darkness whelm,  
Some little word shall light it, raise aloft,  
To where I clearlier see and better love,

As I again go o'er the tracts of thought  
Like one who has a right, and I shall live  
With poets, calmer, purer still each time,  
And beauteous shapes will come for me to seize,  
And unknown secrets will be trusted me  
Which were denied the waverer once ; but now  
I shall be priest and prophet as of old.

*S*un-treader, I believe in God and truth  
And love ; and as one just escaped from death  
Would bind himself in bands of friends to feel  
He lives indeed, so, I would lean on thee !  
Thou must be ever with me, most in gloom  
If such must come, but chiefly when I die,  
For I seem, dying, as one going in the dark  
To fight a giant : but live thou for ever,  
And be to all what thou hast been to me !  
All in whom this wakes pleasant thoughts of me  
Know my last state is happy, free from doubt  
Or touch of fear. Love me and wish me well.

RICHMOND  
*October 22, 1832.*



S O R D E L L O.



TO J. MILSAND, OF DIJON.

DEAR FRIEND,—Let the next poem be introduced by your name, therefore remembered along with one of the deepest of my affections, and so repay all trouble it ever cost me I wrote it twenty-five years ago for only a few, counting even in these on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had. My own faults of expression were many; but with care for a man or book such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since; for I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might,—instead of what the few must,—like but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it. The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires, and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so—others may one day think so; and whether my attempt remain for them or not, I trust, though away and past it, to continue ever yours,

R. B.

LONDON: *June 9, 1863.*

I.

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# S O R D E L L O.

1840.

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## BOOK THE FIRST.

WHO will, may hear Sordello's story told :  
His story? Who believes me shall behold  
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end,  
Like me: for as the friendless-people's friend  
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din  
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin  
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out  
Sordello, compassed murkily about  
With ravage of six long sad hundred years.  
Only believe me. Ye believe?

Appears

Verona . . . Never,—I should warn you first,—  
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst  
Yet not the best expedient, served to tell

A story I could body forth so well  
By making speak, myself kept out of view,  
The very man as he was wont to do,  
And leaving you to say the rest for him.  
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim  
Abysmal past divide its hateful surge,  
Letting of all men this one man emerge  
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,  
I should delight in watching first to last  
His progress as you watch it, not a whit  
More in the secret than yourselves who sit  
Fresh-chapleted to listen. But it seems  
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,  
Makers of quite new men, producing them,  
Would best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem  
The wearer's quality ; or take their stand,  
Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand,  
Beside him. So, for once I face ye, friends,  
Summoned together from the world's four ends,  
Dropped down from heaven or cast up from hell,  
To hear the story I propose to tell.  
Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,  
Catching the dead, if fate denies the quick,  
And shaming her ; 't is not for fate to choose  
Silence or song because she can refuse  
Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache

Less oft, real brows turn smoother for our sake:  
I have experienced something of her spite;  
But there's a realm wherein she has no right  
And I have many lovers. Say, but few  
Friends fate accords me? Here they are: now view  
The host I muster! Many a lighted face  
Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace;  
What else should tempt them back to taste our air  
Except to see how their successors fare?  
My audience! and they sit, each ghostly man  
Striving to look as living as he can,  
Brother by breathing brother; thou art set,  
Clear-witted critic, by . . . but I'll not fret  
A wondrous soul of them, nor move death's spleen  
Who loves not to unlock them. Friends! I mean  
The living in good earnest—ye elect  
Chiefly for love—suppose not I reject  
Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep,  
Some fit occasion, forth, for fear ye sleep,  
To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear,  
Verona! stay—thou, spirit, come not near  
Now—not this time desert thy cloudy place  
To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face!  
I need not fear this audience, I make free  
With them, but then this is no place for thee!  
The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown

Up out of memories of Marathon,  
Would echo like his own sword's griding screech  
Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech  
Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,  
Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in  
The knights to tilt,—wert thou to hear ! What heart  
Have I to play my puppets, bear my part  
Before these worthies?

Lo, the past is hurled  
In twain : up-thrust, out-staggering on the world,  
Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears  
Its outline, kindles at the core, appears  
Verona. 'T is six hundred years and more  
Since an event. The Second Friedrich wore  
The purple, and the Third Honorius filled  
The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled :  
A last remains of sunset dimly burned  
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned  
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand  
In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand,  
The woods beneath lay black. A single eye  
From all Verona cared for the soft sky.  
But, gathering in its ancient market-place,  
Talked group with restless group ; and not a face  
But wrath made livid, for among them were  
Death's staunch purveyors, such as have in care

To feast him. Fear had long since taken root  
In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,  
The ripe hate, like a wine : to note the way  
It worked while each grew drunk ! Men grave and grey  
Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,  
Letting the silent luxury trickle slow  
About the hollows where a heart should be ;  
But the young gulped with a delirious glee  
Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood  
At the fierce news : for, be it understood,  
Envoy apprised Verona that her prince  
Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since  
A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust  
Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust  
With Ecelin Romano, from his seat  
Ferrara,—over zealous in the feat  
And stumbling on a peril unaware,  
Was captive, trammelled in his proper snare,  
They phrase it, taken by his own intrigue.  
Immediate succour from the Lombard League  
Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,  
For Azzo, therefore, and his fellow-hope  
Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast '  
Men's faces, late agape, are now aghast.  
“ Prone is the purple pavis ; Este makes  
“ Mirth for the devil when he undertakes

“ To play the Ecelin ; as if it cost  
“ Merely your pushing-by to gain a post ,  
“ Like his ! The patron tells ye, once for all,  
“ There be sound reasons that preferment fall  
“ On our beloved” . . .  
“ Duke o’ the Rood, why not?”

Shouted an Estian, “ grudge ye such a lot ?  
“ The hill-cat boasts some cunning of her own,  
“ Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown,  
“ That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts,  
“ And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts.”

“ Taurello,” quoth an envoy, “ as in wane  
“ Dwelt at Ferrara. Like an osprey fain  
“ To fly but forced the earth his couch to make  
“ Far inland, till his friend the tempest wake,  
“ Waits he the Kaiser’s coming ; and as yet  
“ That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps : but let  
“ Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs  
“ The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs  
“ The sea it means to cross because of him.  
“ Sinketh the breeze ? His hope-sick eye grows dim  
“ Creep closer on the creature ! Every day  
“ Strengthens the Pontiff ; Ecelin, they say,  
“ Dozes now at Oliero, with dry lips  
“ Telling upon his perished finger-tips  
“ How many ancestors are to depose

“ Ere he be Satan’s Viceroy when the doze  
“ Deposits him in hell. So, Guelfs rebuilt  
“ Their houses ; not a drop of blood was spilt  
“ When Cino Bocchimpane chanced to meet  
“ Buccio Virtù—God’s wafer, and the street  
“ Is narrow ! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm  
“ With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm !  
“ This could not last. Off Salinguerra went  
“ To Padua, Podestà, ‘with pure intent,’  
“ Said he, ‘my presence, judged the single bar  
“ To permanent tranquillity, may jar  
“ ‘No longer’—so ! his back is fairly turned ?  
“ The pair of goodly palaces are burned,  
“ The gardens ravaged, and our Guelfs laugh, drunk  
“ A week with joy. The next, their laughter sunk  
“ In sobs of blood, for they found, some strange way,  
“ Old Salinguerra back again—I say,  
“ Old Salinguerra in the town once more  
“ Uprooting, overturning, flame before,  
“ Blood fetlock-high beneath him. Azzo fled ;  
“ Who ’scaped the carnage followed ; then the dead  
“ Were pushed aside from Salinguerra’s throne,  
“ He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone,  
“ Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce  
“ Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,  
“ On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth

" To see troop after troop encamp beneath  
" I the standing corn thick o'er the scanty patch  
" It took so many patient months to snatch  
" Out of the marsh ; while just within their walls  
" Men fed on men. At length Taurello calls  
" A parley : 'let the Count wind up the war !'  
" Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,  
" Agrees to enter for the kindest ends  
" Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,  
" No horse-boy more, for fear your timid sort  
" Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.  
" Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog ;  
" 'Ten, twenty, thirty,—curse the catalogue  
" ' Of burnt Guelf houses ! Strange, Taurello shows  
" ' Not the least sign of life'—whereat arose  
" A general growl : 'How? With his victors by?  
" ' I and my Veronese? My troops and I?  
" ' Receive us, was your word?' So jogged they on,  
" Nor laughed their host too openly : once gone  
" Into the trap!—"

Six hundred years ago!

Such the time's aspect and peculiar woe  
(Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles,  
Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills  
His sprawling path through letters anciently  
Made fine and large to suit some abbot's eye)

When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,  
Flung John of Brienne's favour from his casque,  
Forswore crusading, had no mind to leave  
Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve  
Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,  
Or make the Alps less easy to recross ;  
And, thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear,  
Was excommunicate that very year.

“The triple-bearded Teuton come to life!”  
Groaned the Great League ; and, arming for the strife,  
Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,  
Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,  
Its cry : what cry?

“The Emperor to come ! ”

His crowd of feudatories, all and some,  
That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,  
One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,  
Scattered anon, took station here and there,  
And caried it, till now, with little care—  
Cannot but cry for him ; how else rebut  
Us longer?—cliffs, an earthquake suffered jut  
In the mid-sea, each domineering crest  
Which nought save such another throe can wrest  
From out (conceive) a certain chokeweed grown  
Since o'er the waters, twine and tangle thrown  
Too thick, too fast accumulating round,

Too sure to over-riot and confound  
Ere long each brilliant islet with itself,  
Unless a second shock save shoal and shelf,  
Whirling the sea-drift wide: alas, the bruised  
And sullen wreck! Sunlight to be diffused  
For that!—sunlight, 'neath which, a scum at first,  
The million fibres of our chokeweed nurst  
Dispread themselves, mantling the troubled main,  
And, shattered by those rocks, took hold again,  
So kindly blazed it—that same blaze to brood  
O'er every cluster of the multitude  
Still hazarding new clasps, ties, filaments,  
An emulous exchange of pulses, vents  
Of nature into nature; till some growth  
Unfancied yet, exuberantly clothe  
A surface solid now, continuous, one:  
“The Pope, for us the People, who begun  
“The People, carries on the People thus,  
“To keep that Kaiser off and dwell with us!”  
See you?

Or say, Two Principles that live  
Each fitly by its Representative.  
“Hill-cat”—who called him so?—the gracefulest  
Adventurer, the ambiguous stranger-guest  
Of Lombardy (sleek but that ruffling fur,  
Those talons to their sheath!) whose velvet purr

Soothes jealous neighbours when a Saxon scout  
—Arpo or Yoland, is it?—one without  
A country or a name, presumes to couch  
Beside their noblest; until men avouch  
That, of all Houses in the Trevisan,  
Conrad descries no fitter, rear or van,  
Than Ecelo! They laughed as they enrolled  
That name at Milan on the page of gold,  
Godego's lord,—Ramon, Marostica,  
Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria,  
And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief!  
No laughter when his son, “the Lombard Chief”  
Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent  
To Italy along the Vale of Trent,  
Welcomed him at Roncaglia! Sadness now—  
The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,  
The Asolan and Euganean hills,  
The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills  
Them all, for Ecelin vouchsafes to stay  
Among and care about them; day by day  
Choosing this pinnacle, the other spot,  
A castle building to defend a cot,  
A cot built for a castle to defend,  
Nothing but castles, castles, nor an end  
To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge  
By sunken gallery and soaring bridge.

He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems  
The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,  
—A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged  
From its old interests, and nowise changed  
By its new neighbourhood: perchance the vaunt  
Of Otho, "my own Este shall supplant,  
"Your Este," come to pass. The sire led in  
A son as cruel; and this Ecelin  
Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall  
And curling and compliant; but for all  
Romano (so they styled him) threw, that neck  
Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek  
Proved 't was some fiend, not him, the man's-flesh went  
To feed: whereas Romano's instrument,  
Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole  
I' the world, a tree whose boughs were slipt the bole  
Successively, why should not he shed blood  
To further a design? Men understood  
Living was pleasant to him as he wore  
His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,  
Propped on his truncheon in the public way,  
While his lord lifted writhen hands to pray,  
Lost at Oliero's convent.

Hill-cats, face  
Our Azzo, our Guelf Lion! Why disgrace  
A worthiness conspicuous near and far

(Atii at Rome while free and consular,  
Este at Padua who repulsed the Hun)  
By trumpeting the Church's princely son ?  
—Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,  
Ancona's march, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,  
Our chronicles, commenced when some old monk  
Found it intolerable to be sunk  
(Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)  
Quite out of summer while alive and well :  
Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,  
'Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,  
Striving to coax from his decrepit brains  
The reason Father Porphyry took pains  
To blot those ten lines out which used to stand  
First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.

The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore  
Was vested in a certain Twenty-four ;  
And while within his palace these debate  
Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,  
Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare  
Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care  
For aught that 's seen or heard until we shut  
The smother in, the lights, all noises but  
The carroch's booming : safe at last ! Why strange  
Such a recess should lurk behind a range  
Of banquet-rooms ? Your finger—thus—you push

A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush  
Upon the banqueters, select your prey,  
Waiting (the slaughter-weapons in the way  
Strewing this very bench) with sharpened ear  
A preconcerted signal to appear ;  
Or if you simply crouch with beating heart,  
Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part  
To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now ;  
Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow  
The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er ?  
What woman stood beside him? not the more  
Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes  
Because that arras fell between ! Her wise  
And lulling words are yet about the room,  
Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom  
Down even to her vesture's creeping stir.  
And so reclines he, saturate with her,  
Until an outcry from the square beneath  
Pierces the charm : he springs up, glad to breathe,  
Above the cunning element, and shakes  
The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks  
On the gay dress, and, near concealed by it,  
The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit .  
Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away  
Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying day,  
In his wool wedding-robe.

For he—for he,  
Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy,  
(If I should falter now)—for he is thine !  
Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine !  
A herald-star I know thou didst absorb  
Relentless into the consummate orb  
That scared it from its right to roll along  
A sempiternal path with dance and song  
Fulfilling its allotted period,  
Serenest of the progeny of God—  
Who yet resigns it not ! His darling stoops  
With no quenched lights, despends with no blank troops  
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent  
Utterly with thee, its shy element  
Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear.  
Still, what if I approach the august sphere  
Named now with only one name, disentwine  
That under-current soft and argentine  
From its fierce mate in the majestic mass  
Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass  
In John's transcendent vision,—launch once more  
That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore  
Where glutted hell disgorgheth filthiest gloom,  
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—  
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope  
Into a darkness quieted by hope ;

Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye  
In gracious twilights where his chosen lie,—  
I would do this ! If I should falter now !

In Mantua territory half is slough,  
Half pine-tree forest ; maples, scarlet oaks  
Breed o'er the river-beds ; even Mincio chokes  
With sand the summer through : but 't is morass  
In winter up to Mantua walls. There was,  
Some thirty years before this evening's coil,  
One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,  
Goito ; just a castle built amid  
A few low mountains ; firs and larches hid  
Their main defiles, and rings of vineyard bound  
The rest. Some captured creature in a pound,  
Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,  
Secure beside in its own loveliness,  
So peered with airy head, below, above,  
The castle at its toils, the lapwings love  
To glean among at grape-time. Pass within.  
A maze of corridors contrived for sin,  
Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,  
You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last  
A maple-panelled room : that haze which seems  
Floating about the panel, if there gleams  
A sunbeam over it, will turn to gold  
And in light-graven characters unfold

The Arab's wisdom everywhere ; what shade  
Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,  
Cut like a company of palms to prop  
The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,  
Leaning together ; in the carver's mind  
Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined  
With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair  
Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear  
A vintage ; graceful sister-palms ! But quick  
To the main wonder, now. A vault, see , thick  
Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits  
Across the buttress suffer light by fits  
Upon a marvel in the midst. Nay, stoop—  
A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group  
Round it,—each side of it, where'er one sees,—  
Upholds it ; shrinking Caryatides  
Of just-tinged marble like Eve's lilyed flesh  
Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh  
First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.  
The font's edge burthenes every shoulder, so  
They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed ;  
Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,  
Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil  
Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,  
Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length  
Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength

Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.  
So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,  
Like priestesses because of sin impure  
Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,  
Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs.  
And every eve, Sordello's visit begs  
Pardon for them : constant as eve he came  
To sit beside each in her turn, the same  
As one of them, a certain space : and awe  
Made a great indistinctness till he saw  
Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress-chinks,  
Gold seven times globed ; surely our maiden shrinks  
And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain  
Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain  
Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt  
From off the rosary whereby the crypt  
Keeps count of the contritions of its charge?  
Then with a step more light, a heart more large,  
He may depart, leave her and every one  
To linger out the penance in mute stone.  
Ah, but Sordello ? 'T is the tale I mean  
To tell you.

In this castle may be seen,  
On the hill tops, or underneath the vines,  
Or eastward by the mound of firs and pines  
That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,

A slender boy in a loose page's dress,  
Sordello : do but look on him awhile  
Watching ('t is autumn) with an earnest smile  
The noisy flock of thievish birds at work  
Among the yellowing vineyards ; see him lurk  
('T is winter with its sullenest of storms)  
Beside that arras-length of broidered forms,  
On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light  
Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright  
—Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,  
And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed,  
Auria, and their Child, with all his wives  
From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,  
Lady of the castle, Adelaide. His face  
—Look, now he turns away ! Yourselves shall trace  
(The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,  
A sharp and restless lip, so well combine  
With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive  
Delight at every sense ; you can believe  
Sordello foremost in the regal class  
Nature has broadly severed from her mass  
Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames  
Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,  
For loose fertility ; a footfall there  
Suffices to upturn to the warm air  
Half-germinating spices ; mere decay

Produces richer life ; and day by day  
New pollen on the lily-petal grows,  
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.  
You recognise at once the finer dress  
Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness  
At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled  
(As though she would not trust them with her world)  
A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,  
And lets but half the sun look fervid through.  
How can such love?—like souls on each full-fraught  
Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught  
Beyond its beauty, till exceeding love  
Becomes an aching weight ; and, to remove  
A curse that haunts such natures—to preclude  
Their finding out themselves can work no good  
To what they love nor make it very blest  
By their endeavour,—they are fain invest  
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,  
Availing it to purpose, to control,  
To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy  
And separate interests that may employ  
That beauty fitly, for its proper sake.  
Nor rest they here ; fresh births of beauty wake  
Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,  
With every mode of loveliness : then cast  
Inferior idols off their borrowed crown

Before a coming glory. Up and down  
Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine  
To throb the secret forth ; a touch divine—  
And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod ;  
Visibly through his garden walketh God.

So fare they. Now revert. One character  
Denotes them through the progress and the stir,—  
A need to blend with each external charm,  
Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,—  
In something not themselves ; they would belong  
To what they worship—stronger and more strong  
Thus prodigally fed—which gathers shape  
And feature, soon imprisons past escape  
The votary framed to love and to submit  
Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,  
Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs  
A legend ; light had birth ere moons and suns,  
Flowing through space a river and alone,  
Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown  
Hither and thither, foundering and blind :  
When into each of them rushed light—to find  
Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.  
Let such forego their just inheritance !  
For there 's a class that eagerly looks, too,  
On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,  
Proclaims each new revealment born a twin

With a distinctest consciousness within,  
Referring still the quality, now first  
Revealed, to their own soul—its instinct nursed  
In silence, now remembered better, shown  
More thoroughly, but not the less their own ;  
A dream come true ; the special exercise  
Of any special function that implies  
The being fair, or good, or wise, or strong,  
Dormant within their nature all along—  
Whose fault? So, homage, other souls direct  
Without, turns inward. “How should this deject  
“Thee, soul?” they murmur ; “wherefore strength be  
quelled  
“Because, its trivial accidents withheld,  
“Organs are missed that clog the world, inert,  
“Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,  
“Like thine—existence cannot satiate,  
“Cannot surprise? Laugh thou at envious fate,  
“Who, from earth’s simplest combination stamp’t  
“With individuality—uncrampt  
“By living its faint elemental life,  
“Dost soar to heaven’s completest essence, rife  
“With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,  
“Equal to being all !”

In truth? Thou hast  
Life, then—wilt challenge life for us : our race

Is vindicated so, obtains its place  
In thy ascent, the first of us ; whom we  
May follow, to the meanest, finally,  
With our more bounded wills ?

Ah, but to find

A certain mood enervate such a mind,  
Counsel it slumber in the solitude  
Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good  
Its nature just as life and time accord  
“—Too narrow an arena to reward  
“Emprise—the world's occasion worthless since  
“Not absolutely fitted to evince  
“Its mastery !” Or if yet worse besfall,  
And a desire possess it to put all  
That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere  
Contain it,—to display completely here  
The mastery another life should learn,  
Thrusting in time eternity's concern,—  
So that Sordello. . . .

Fool, who spied the mark

Of leprosy upon him, violet-dark  
Already as he loiters ? Born just now,  
With the new century, beside the glow  
And efflorescence out of barbarism ;  
Witness a Greek or two from the abysm  
That stray through Florence-town with studious air,

Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair :  
If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet !  
While at Siena is Guidone set,  
Forehead on hand ; a painful birth must be  
Matured ere Saint Eufemia's sacristy  
Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze  
At the moon : look you ! The same orange haze,—  
The same blue stripe round that—and, in the midst,  
Thy spectral whiteness, Mother-maid, who didst  
Pursue the dizzy painter !

Woe, then, worth

Any officious babble letting forth  
The leprosy confirmed and ruinous  
To spirit lodged in a contracted house !  
Go back to the beginning, rather ; blend  
It gently with Sordello's life ; the end  
Is piteous, you may see, but much between  
Pleasant enough. Meantime, some pyx to screen  
The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon  
The goblin ! So they found at Babylon,  
(Colleagues, mad Lucius and sage Antonine)  
Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine,  
In rummaging among the rarities,  
A certain coffer ; he who made the prize  
Opened it greedily ; and out there curled  
Just such another plague, for half the world

Was stung. Crawl in then, hag, and couch asquat,  
Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot  
Until your time is ripe ! The coffer-lid  
Is fastened, and the coffer safely hid  
Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.

Who will may hear Sordello's story told,  
And how he never could remember when  
He dwelt not at Goito. Calmly, then,  
About this secret lodge of Adelaide's  
Glided his youth away ; beyond the glades  
On the fir-forest border, and the rim  
Of the low range of mountain, was for him  
No other world : but this appeared his own  
To wander through at pleasure and alone.  
The castle too seemed empty ; far and wide  
Might he disport ; only the northern side  
Lay under a mysterious interdict—  
Slight, just enough remembered to restrict  
His roaming to the corridors, the vault  
Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,  
The maple-chamber, and the little nooks  
And nests, and breezy parapet that looks  
Over the woods to Mantua : there he strolled.  
Some foreign women-servants, very old,  
Tended and crept about him—all his clue  
To the world's business and embroiled ado  
Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.

And first a simple sense of life engrossed  
Sordello in his drowsy Paradise ;  
The day's adventures for the day suffice—  
Its constant tribute of perceptions strange,  
With sleep and stir in healthy interchange,  
Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease  
Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,  
Eats the life out of every luscious plant,  
And, when September finds them sere or scant,  
Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,  
And hies him after unforeseen delight.  
So fed Sordello, not a shard dissheathed ;  
As ever, round each new discovery, wreathed  
Luxuriantly the fancies infantine  
His admiration, bent on making fine  
Its novel friend at any risk, would fling  
In gay profusion forth : a ficklest king,  
Confessed those minions !—eager to dispense  
So much from his own stock of thought and sense  
As might enable each to stand alone  
And serve him for a fellow ; with his own,  
Joining the qualities that just before  
Had graced some older favourite. Thus they wore  
A fluctuating halo, yesterday  
Set flicker and to-morrow filched away,—  
Those upland objects each of separate name,

Each with an aspect never twice the same,  
Waxing and waning as the new-born host  
Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,  
Gave to familiar things a face grotesque ;  
Only, preserving through the mad burlesque  
A grave regard. Conceive ! the orpine patch  
Blossoming earliest on the log-house thatch  
The day those archers wound along the vines—  
Related to the Chief that left their lines  
To climb with clinking step the northern stair  
Up to the solitary chambers where  
Sordello never came. Thus thrall reached thrall ;  
He o'er-festooning every interval,  
As the adventurous spider, making light  
Of distance, shoots her thieads from depth to height.  
From barbican to battlement : so flung  
Fantasies forth and in their centre swung  
Our architect,—the breezy morning fresh  
Above, and merry,—all his waving mesh  
Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.

This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged  
To laying such a spangled fabric low  
Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow.  
But its abundant will was baulked here : doubt  
Rose tardily in one so fenced about  
From most that nurtures judgment,—care and pain :

Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,  
Less favoured, to adopt betimes and force  
Stead us, diverted from our natural course  
Of joys—contrive some yet amid the dearth,  
Vary and render them, it may be, worth  
Most we forego. Suppose Sordello hence  
Selfish enough, without a moral sense  
However feeble; what informed the boy  
Others desired a portion in his joy?  
Or say a Ruthful chance broke woof and warp—  
A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp,  
A fawn breathless beneath the precipice,  
A bird with unsoled breast and unfilmed eyes  
Warm in the brake—could these undo the trance  
Lapping Sordello? Not a circumstance  
That makes for you, friend Naddo! Eat fern-seed  
And peer beside us and report indeed  
If (your word) "genius" dawned with throes and  
stings  
And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs,  
Summers, and winters quietly came and went.

Time put at length that period to content,  
By right the world should have imposed: bereft  
Of its good offices, Sordello, left  
To study his companions, managed rip  
Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,

Core with its crust, their nature with his own:  
Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone.  
As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he  
Partook the poppy's red effrontery  
Till Autumn spoiled their fleering quite with rain,  
And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane  
Lay bare. That 's gone : yet why renounce, for that,  
His disenchanted tributaries—flat  
Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn,  
Their simple presence might not well be borne  
Whose parley was a transport once : recall  
The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,  
A poppy :—why distrust the evidence  
Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense?  
The new-born judgment answered, “ little boots  
“ Beholding other creatures' attributes  
“ And having none !” or, say that it sufficed,  
“ Yet, could one but possess, oneself,” (enticed  
Judgment) “ some special office ! ” Nought beside  
Serves you? “ Well then, be somehow justified  
“ For this ignoble wish to circumscribe  
“ And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe  
“ Of actual pleasures : what, now, from without  
“ Effects it?—proves, despite a lurking doubt,  
“ Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared?  
“ That, tasting joys by proxy thus, you fared

“The better for them?” Thus much craved his soul,  
Alas, from the beginning love is whole  
And true; if sure of nought beside, most sure  
Of its own truth at least; nor may endure  
A crowd to see its face, that cannot know  
How hot the pulses throb its heart below.  
While its own helplessness and utter want  
Of means to worthily be ministrant  
To what it worships, do but fan the more  
Its flame, exalt the idol far before  
Itself as it would have it ever be.  
Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,  
Coerced and put to shame, retaining will,  
Care little, take mysterious comfort still,  
But look forth tremblingly to ascertain  
If others judge their claims not urged in vain,  
And say for them their stifled thoughts aloud.  
So, they must ever live before a crowd:  
—“Vanity,” Naddo tells you.

Whence contrive

A crowd, now? From these women just alive,  
That archer-troop? Forth glided—not alone  
Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,  
Nor Adelaide (bent double o'er a scroll,  
One maiden at her knees, that eve, his soul  
Shook as he stumbled through the arras'd glooms

On them, for, 'mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,  
Started the meagre Tuscan up,—her eyes,  
The maiden's, also, bluer with surprise)  
—But the entire out-world: whatever, scraps  
And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,  
Conceited the world's offices, and he  
Had hitherto transferred to flower or tree,  
Not counted a befitting heritage  
Each, of its own right, singly to engage  
Some man, no other,—such now dared to stand  
Alone. Strength, wisdom, grace on every hand  
Soon disengaged themselves, and he discerned  
A sort of human life. at least, was turned  
A stream of lifelike figures through his brain.  
Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain,  
Ere he could choose, surrounded him; a stuff  
To work his pleasure on; there, sure enough:  
But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze?  
Are they to simply testify the ways  
He who convoked them sends his soul along  
With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song?  
—While they live each his life, boast each his own  
Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone  
In some one point where something dearest loved  
Is easiest gained—far worthier to be proved  
Than aught he envies in the forest-wights!

No simple and self-evident delights,  
But mixed desires of unimagined range,  
Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,  
Irksome perhaps, yet plainly recognized  
By this, the sudden company—loves prized  
By those who are to prize his own amount  
Of loves. Once care because such make account,  
Allow that foreign recognitions stamp  
The current value, and his crowd shall vamp  
Him counterfeits enough; and so their print  
Be on the piece, 't is gold, attests the mint,  
And "good," pronounce they whom his new appeal  
Is made to: if their casual print conceal—  
This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss  
What he has lived without, nor felt the loss—  
Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,  
—What matter? So must speech expand the dumb  
Part-sigh, part-smile with which Sordello, late  
Whom no poor woodland-sights could satiate,  
Betakes himself to study hungrily  
Just what the puppets his crude phantasy  
Supposes notablest,—popes, kings, priests, knights,—  
May please to promulgate for appetites;  
Accepting all their artificial joys  
Not as he views them, but as he employs  
Each shape to estimate the other's stock

Of attributes, whereon—a marshalled flock  
Of authorized enjoyments—he may spend  
Himself, be men, now, as he used to blend  
With tree and flower—nay more entirely, else  
'T were mockery: for instance, "How excels  
"My life that chieftain's?" (who apprised the youth  
Ecelin, here, becomes this month, in truth,  
Imperial Vicar?) "Turns he in his tent  
"Remissly? Be it so—my head is bent  
"Deliciously amid my girls to sleep.  
"What if he stalks the Trentine-pass? Yon steep  
"I climbed an hour ago with little toil:  
"We are alike there. But can I, too, foil  
"The Guelf's paid stabber, carelessly afford  
"Saint Mark's a spectacle, the sleight o' the sword  
"Baffling the treason in a moment?" Here  
No rescue! Poppy he is none, but peer  
To Ecelin, assuredly: his hand,  
Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand  
With Ecelin's success—try, now! He soon  
Was satisfied, returned as to the moon  
From earth; left each abortive boy's-attempt  
For feats, from failure happily exempt,  
In fancy at his beck. "One day I will  
"Accomplish it! Are they not older still  
"—Not grown-up men and women? 'T is beside

“ Only a dream ; and though I must abide  
“ With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent  
“ For all myself, acquire an instrument  
“ For acting what these people act ; my soul  
“ Hunting a body out may gain its whole  
“ Desire some day ! ” How else express chagrin  
And resignation, show the hope steal in  
With which he let sink from an aching wrist  
The rough-hewn ash-bow ? Straight, a gold shaft hissed  
Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down  
Superbly ! “ Crosses to the breach ! God’s Town  
“ Is gained him back ! ” Why bend rough ash-bows more ?  
    Thus lives he : if not careless as before,  
Comforted : for one may anticipate,  
Rehearse the future, be prepared when fate  
Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names  
Startle, real places of enormous fames,  
Este abroad and Ecelin at home  
To worship him,—Mantua, Verona, Rome  
To witness it. Who grudges time so spent ?  
Rather test qualities to heart’s content—  
Summon them, thrice selected, near and far—  
Compress the starriest into one star,  
And grasp the whole at once !

The pageant thinned  
Accordingly ; from rank to rank, like wind

His spirit passed to winnow and divide ;  
Back fell the simpler phantasms ; every side  
The strong clave to the wise ; with either classed  
The beauteous ; so, till two or three amassed  
Mankind's beseemingnesses, and reduced  
Themselves eventually,—graces loosed,  
Strengths lavished,—all to heighten up One Shape  
Whose potency no creature should escape.  
Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk?  
Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,  
Is some grey scorching Saracenic wine  
The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline—  
Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped,  
Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,  
Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent  
To keep in mind his sluggish armament  
Of Canaan :—Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce  
Demeanour ! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce  
So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells  
Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells  
On the obdurate ! That right arm indeed  
Has thunder for its slave ; but where 's the need  
Of thunder if the stricken multitude  
Hearkens, arrested in its angriest mood,  
While songs go up exulting, then disspread,  
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead

Like an escape of angels? 'T is the tune,  
Nor much unlike the words his women croon  
Smilingly, colourless and faint-designed  
Each, as a worn-out queen's face some remind  
Of her extreme youth's love-tales. "Eglamor  
"Made that!" Half minstrel and half emperor,  
What but ill objects vexed him? Such he slew.  
The kinder sort were easy to subdue  
By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones;  
And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones  
Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,  
Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,  
Instead of saying, neither less nor more,  
He had discovered, as our world before,  
Apollo? That shall be the name; nor bid  
Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid  
The youth—what thefts of every clime and day  
Contributed to purifie the array  
He climbed with (June at deep) some close ravine  
Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,  
Over which, singing soft, the runnel slipped  
Elate with rains: into whose streamlet dipped  
He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—  
Though really on the stubs of living rock  
Ages ago it crenelled; vines for roof,  
Lindens for wall; before him, aye aloof,

Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,  
Born of the simmering quiet, there to die.  
Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied  
Mighty descents of forest ; multiplied  
Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees,  
There gendered the grave maple stocks at ease.  
And, proud<sup>3</sup> of its observer, straight the wood  
Tried old surprises on him ; black it stood  
A sudden barrier ('twas a cloud passed o'er)  
So dead and dense, the tiniest brute no more  
Must pass ; yet presently (the cloud dispatched)  
Each clump, behold, was glistering detached  
A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems !  
Yet could not he denounce the stratagems  
He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang  
White summer-lightnings ; as it sank and sprang  
To measure, that whole palpitating breast  
Of heaven, 't was Apollo, nature prest  
At eve to worship.

Time stole : by degrees

The Pythons perish off; his votaries  
Sink to respectful distance ; songs redeem  
Their pains, but briefer ; their dismissals seem  
Emphatic; only girls are very slow  
To disappear—his Delians ! Some that glow  
O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench

Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench ;  
Alike in one material circumstance—  
All soon or late adore Apollo ! Glance  
The bevy through; divine Apollo's choice,  
His Daphne ! “We secure Count Richard's voice  
“In Este's counsels, good for Este's ends  
“As our Taurello,” say his faded friendas,  
“By granting him our Palma !”—the sole child,  
They mean, of Agnes Este who beguiled  
Ecelin, years before this Adelaide  
Wedded and turned him wicked : “but the maid  
“Rejects his suit,” those sleepy women boast.  
She, scorning all beside, deserves the most  
Sordello : so, conspicuous in his world  
Of dreams sat Palma. How the tresses curled  
Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound  
About her like a glory ! even the ground  
Was bright as with spilt sunbeams ; breathe not, breathe  
Not !—poised, see, one leg doubled underneath,  
Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow,  
Rests, but the other, listlessly below,  
O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,  
The vein-streaks swollen a richer violet where  
The languid blood lies heavily ; yet calm  
On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,  
As but suspended in the act to rise

By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes  
Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets  
Apollo's gaze in the pine glooms.

Time fleets :

That 's worst ! Because the pre-appointed age  
Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage  
And crowd she promised. Lean he grows and pale,  
Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail  
Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone  
He tarries here ! The earnest smile is gone.  
How long this might continue matters not ;  
—For ever, possibly ; since to the spot  
None come : our lingering Taurello quits  
Mantua at last, and light our lady flits  
Back to her place disburthened of a care.  
Strange—to be constant here if he is there !  
Is it distrust ? Oh, never ! for they both  
Goad Ecelin alike, Romano's growth  
Is daily manifest, with Azzo dumb  
And Richard wavering : let but Friedrich come,  
Find matter for the minstrelsy's report  
—Lured from the Isle and its young Kaiser's court  
To sing us a Messina morning up,  
And, double rillet of a drinking cup,  
Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth,  
Northward to Provence that, and thus far south

The other ! What a method to apprise  
Neighbours of births, espousals, obsequies,  
Which in their very tongue the Troubadour  
Records ! and his performance makes a tour,  
For Trouveres bear the miracle about,  
Explain its cunning to the vulgar rout,  
Until the Formidable House is fain'd  
Over the country—as Taurello aimed,  
Who introduced, although the rest adopt,  
The novelty. Such games, her absence stopped,  
Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse  
No longer, in the light of day pursues  
Her plans at Mantua : whence an accident  
Which, breaking on Sordello's mixed content  
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind,  
The veritable business of mankind.

## BOOK THE SECOND

THE woods were long austere with snow : at last  
Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast  
Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,  
Brightened, “as in the slumbrous heart o’ the woods  
“Our buried year, a witch, grew young again  
“To placid incantations, and that stain  
“About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent  
“With those black pines”—so Eglamor gave vent  
To a chance fancy. Whence a just rebuke  
From his companion ; brother Naddo shook  
The solemnest of brows : “Beware,” he said,  
“Of setting up conceits in nature’s stead!”  
Forth wandered our Sordello. Nought so sure  
As that to-day’s adventure will secure  
Palma, the visioned lady—only pass  
O’er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,  
Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks  
Of withered fern with gold, into those walks

Of pine and take her! Buoyantly he went.  
Again his stooping forehead was besprent  
With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide  
Opened the great morass, shot every side  
With flashing water through and through ; a-shine,  
Thick-steaming, all-alive. Whose shape divine,  
Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced  
Athwart the flying herons? He advanced,  
But warily; though Mincio leaped no more,  
Each foot-fall burst up in the marish-floor  
A diamond jet: and if he stopped to pick  
Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick,  
And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,  
A sudden pond would silently encroach  
This way and that. On Palma passed. The verge  
Of a new wood was gained. She will emerge  
Flushed, now, and panting,—crowds to see,—will own  
She loves him—Boniface to hear, to groan,  
To leave his suit! One screen of pine-trees still  
Opposes: but—the startling spectacle—  
Mantua, this time! Under the walls—a crowd  
Indeed, real men and women, gay and loud  
Round a pavilion. How he stood!

In truth  
No prophecy had come to pass: his youth  
In its prime now—and where was homage poured

Upon Sordello?—born to be adored,  
And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made  
To cope with any, cast into the shade  
By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick  
And tingle in his blood; a sleight—a trick—  
And much would be explained. It went for nought—  
The best of their endowments were ill bought  
With his identity: nay, the conceit,  
That this day's roving led to Palma's feet  
Was not so vain—list! The word, “Palma!” Steal  
Aside, and die, Sordello; this is real,  
And this—abjure!

What next? The curtains see  
Dividing! She is there; and presently  
He will be there—the proper You, at length—  
In your own cherished dress of grace and strength:  
Most like, the very Boniface!

Not so.

It was a showy man advanced; but though  
A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound  
Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,  
—“This is not he,” Sordello felt; while, “Place  
“For the best Troubadour of Boniface!”  
Hollaed the Jongleurs,—“Eglamor, whose lay  
“Concludes his patron’s Court of Love to-day!”  
Obsequious Naddo strung the master’s lute

With the new lute-string, "Elys," named to suit  
The song: he stealthily at watch, the while,  
Biting his lip to keep down a great smile  
Of pride: then up he struck. Sordello's brain  
Swam; for he knew a sometime deed again;  
So, could supply each foolish gap and chasm  
The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,  
Mistaking its true version—was the tale  
Not of Apollo? Only, what avail  
Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,  
If the man dared no further? Has he ceased  
And, lo, the people's frank applause half done,  
Sordello was beside him, had begun  
(Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend  
The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,  
Taking the other's names and time and place  
For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,  
After the flying story; word made leap  
Out word, rhyme—rhyme; the lay could barely keep  
Pace with the action visibly rushing past:  
Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast  
Than some Egyptian from the harassed bull  
That wheeled abrupt and, bellowing, fronted full  
His plague, who spied a scarab 'neath the tongue,  
And found 't was Apis' flank his hasty prong  
Insulted. But the people—but the cries,

The crowding round, and proffering the prize !  
—For he had gained some prize. He seemed to shrink  
Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink  
One sight withheld him. There sat Adelaide,  
Silent ; but at her knees the very maid  
Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,  
The same pure fleecy hair ; one weft of which,  
Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er  
She leant, speaking some six words and no more.  
He answered something, anything ; and she  
Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily  
Upon him, her neck's warmth and all. Again  
Moved the arrested magic ; in his brain  
Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,  
And greater glare, until the intense flare  
Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense.  
And when he woke 't was many a furlong thence,  
At home ; the sun shining his ruddy wont ;  
The customary birds'-chirp ; but his front  
Was crowned—was crowned ! Her scented scarf around  
His neck ! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground ?  
A prize ? He turned, and peeringly on him  
Brooded the women-faces, kind and dim,  
Ready to talk—“The Jongleurs in a troop  
“Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe  
“And Tagliafer ; how strange ! a childhood spent

"In taking, well for him, so brave a bent !  
"Since Eglamor," they heard, "was dead with spite,  
"And Palma chose him for her minstrel."

Light

Sordello rose—to think, now ; hitherto  
He had perceived. Sure, a discovery grew  
Out of it all ! Best live from first to last  
The transport o'er again. A week he passed,  
Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,  
From the bard's outbreak to the luscious trance  
Bounding his own achievement. Strange ! A man  
Recounted an adventure, but began  
Imperfectly ; his own task was to fill  
The frame-work up, sing well what he sung ill,  
Supply the necessary points, set loose  
As many incidents of little use  
—More imbecile the other, not to see  
Their relative importance clear as he !  
But, for a special pleasure in the act  
Of singing—had he ever turned, in fact,  
From Elys, to sing Elys ?—from each fit  
Of rapture to contrive a song of it ?  
True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind  
Into a treasure, helped himself to find  
A beauty in himself ; for, see, he soared  
By means of that mere snatch, to many a hoard

Of fancies ; as some falling cone bears soft  
The eye along the fir-tree-spire, aloft  
To a dove's nest. Then, how divine the cause  
Why such performance should exact applause  
From men, if they had fancies too ? Did fate  
Decree they found a beauty separate  
In the poor snatch itself?—"Take Elys, there,  
"—"Her head that 's sharp and perfect like a pear,  
" "So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks  
" "Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks  
" "Sun-blanch'd the livelong summer"—if they heard  
"Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,  
" And loved them as I love them who have run  
"These fingers through those pale locks, let the sun  
" Into the white cool skin—who first could clutch,  
"Then praise—I needs must be a god to such.  
"Or what if some, above themselves, and yet  
"Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set  
"An impress on our gift? So, men believe  
"And worship what they know not, nor receive  
"Delight from. Have they fancies—slow, perchance,  
"Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance  
"Until, by song, each floating part be linked  
"To each, and all grow palpable, distinct?"  
He pondered this.

Meanwhile, sounds low and drear

Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near  
And nearer, while the underwood was pushed  
Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed  
At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid ;  
Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade  
Came o'er the sky although 't was midday yet :  
You saw each half-shut downcast floweret  
Flutter—"a Roman bride, when they'd dispart  
" Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,  
" Holding that famous rape in memory still,  
" Felt creep into her curls the iron chill,  
" And looked thus," Eglamor would say—indeed  
'T is Eglamor, no other, these precede  
Home hither in the woods. "'T were surely sweet  
" Far from the scene of one's forlorn defeat  
" To sleep !" judged Naddo, who in person led  
Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,  
A scanty company ; for, sooth to say,  
Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day.  
Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends  
Nigh weary ; still the death proposed amends.  
" Let us but get them safely through my song  
" And home again !" quoth Naddo.

All along,  
This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)  
—This calm corpse with the loose flowers in his hand,

E glamor, lived Sordello's opposite.  
For him indeed was Naddo's notion right,  
And verse a temple-worship vague and vast,  
A ceremony that withdrew the last  
Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil  
Which hid the holy place : should one so frail  
Stand there without such effort? or repine  
If much was blank, uncertain at the shrine  
He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,  
The power responded, and some sound or sight  
Grew up, his own forever, to be fixed,  
In rhyme, the beautiful, forever!—mixed  
With his own life, unloosed when he should please,  
Having it safe at hand, ready to ease  
All pain, remove all trouble ; every time  
He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme,  
(Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love)  
Faltering ; so distinct and far above  
Himself, these fancies ! He, no genius rare,  
Transfiguring in fire or wave or air  
At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up  
In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,  
His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few  
And their arrangement finds enough to do  
For his best art. Then, how he loved that art !  
The calling marking him a man apart

From men—one not to care, take counsel for  
Cold hearts, comfortless faces—(Eglamor  
Was neediest of his tribe)—since verse, the gift,  
Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift  
Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth  
And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.  
So, Eglamor was not without his pride !

The sorriest bat which cowers throughout noontide  
While other birds are jocund, has one time  
When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime  
Of earth is his to claim, nor find a peer ;  
And Eglamor was noblest poet here—  
He well knew, 'mid those April woods he cast  
Conceits upon in plenty as he passed,  
That Naddo might suppose him not to think  
Entirely on the coming triumph : wink  
At the one weakness ! 'T was a fervid child,  
That song of his ; no brother of the guild  
Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know,  
The exaltation and the overthrow :  
Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,  
His life—to that it came. Yet envy sank  
Within him, as he heard Sordello out,  
And, for the first time, shouted—tried to shout  
Like others, not from any zeal to show  
Pleasure that way : the common sort did so,

What else was Eglamor? who, bending down  
As they, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,  
Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,  
Left one great tear on it, then joined his band  
—In time, for some were watching at the door:  
Who knows what envy may effect? “Give o'er,  
“Nor charm his lips, nor craze him!” (here one spied  
And disengaged the withered crown)—“Beside  
“His crown? How prompt and clear those verses rang  
“To answer yours! nay, sing them!” And he sang  
Them calmly. Home he went; friends used to wait  
His coming, zealous to congratulate;  
But, to a man—so quickly runs report—  
Could do no less than leave him, and escort  
His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought:  
What must his future life be? was he brought  
So low, who stood so lofty this Spring morn?  
At length he said, “Best sleep now with my ‘corn,  
“And by to-morrow I devise some plain  
“Expedient!” So, he slept, nor woke again.  
They found as much, those friends, when they returned  
O'erflowing with the marvels they had learned  
About Sordello's paradise, his roves  
Among the hills and vales and plains and groves,  
Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,  
Polished by slow degrees, completed last  
To Eglamor's discomfiture and death.

Such form the chanters now, and, out of breath,  
They lay the beaten man in his abode,  
Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,  
Doleful to hear. Sordello could explore  
By means of it, however, one step more  
In joy ; and, mastering the round at length,  
Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,  
When from his covert forth he stood, addressed  
Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,  
Primæval pines o'ercanopy his couch,  
And, most of all, his fame—(shall I avouch  
Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,  
And laughed as from his brow Sordello took  
The crown, and laid on the bard's breast, and said  
It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head?)

—Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell.  
A plant they have, yielding a three-leaved bell  
Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails  
Till evening ; evening gives it to her gales  
To clear away with such forgotten things  
As are an eyesore to the morn : this brings  
Him to their mind, and bears his very name.

So much for Eglamor. My own month came ;  
'T was a sunrise of blossoming and May.  
Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay  
Sordello ; each new sprinkle of white stars

That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars  
Dug up at Baiæ, when the south wind shed  
The ripest, made him happier ; filleted  
And robed the same, only a lute beside  
Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide  
The country stretched . Goito slept behind  
—The castle and its covert, which confined  
Him with his hopes and fears ; so fain of old  
To leave the story of his birth untold.  
At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow  
Of his Apollo-life, a certain low  
And wretched whisper, winding through the bliss,  
Admonished, no such fortune could be his,  
All was quite false and sure to fade one day :  
The closelier drew he round him his array  
Of brilliance to expel the truth. But when  
A reason for his difference from men  
Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest  
While aught of that old life, superbly dressed  
Down to its meanest incident, remained  
A mystery . alas, they soon explained  
Away Apollo ! and the tale amounts  
To this : when at Vicenza both her counts  
Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,  
Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,  
Reviled him as he followed ; he for spite

Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night  
Among the flames young Ecelin was born  
Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn  
From the roused populace hard on the rear,  
By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear  
Grew high; into the thick Elcorte leapt,  
Saved her, and died; no creature left except  
His child to thank. And when the full escape  
Was known—how men impaled from chine to nape  
Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned  
Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned  
Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,  
Missing the sweeter prey—such courage well  
Might claim reward. The orphan, ever since,  
Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince  
Within a blind retreat where Adelaide—  
(For, once this notable discovery made,  
The past at every point was understood)  
—Might harbour easily when times were rude,  
When Azzo schemed for Palma, to retrieve  
That pledge of Agnes Este—loth to leave  
Mantua unguarded with a vigilant eye,  
While there Taurello bode ambiguously—  
He who could have no motive now to moil  
For his own fortunes since their utter spoil—  
As it were worth while yet (went the report)

To disengage himself from her. In short,  
Apollo vanished ; a mean youth, just named  
His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed  
—How shall I phrase it?—Monarch of the World !  
For, on the day when that array was furled  
Forever, and in place of one a slave  
To longings, wild indeed, but longings save  
In dreams as wild, suppressed—one daring not  
Assume the mastery such dreams allot,  
Until a magical equipment, strength,  
Grace, wisdom, decked him too,—he chose at length,  
Content with unproved wits and failing frame,  
In virtue of his simple will, to claim  
That mastery, no less—to do his best  
With means so limited, and let the rest  
Go by,—the seal was set : never again  
Sordello could in his own sight remain  
One of the many, one with hopes and cares  
And interests nowise distinct from theirs,  
Only peculiar in a thriveless store  
Of fancies, which were fancies and no more ;  
Never again for him and for the crowd  
A common law was challenged and allowed  
If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied  
By a mad impulse nothing justified  
Short of Apollo's presence. The divorce

Is clear : why needs Sordello square his course  
By any known example? Men no more  
Compete with him than tree and flower before.  
Himself, inactive, yet is greater far  
Than such as act, each stooping to his star,  
Acquiring thence his function ; he has gained  
The same result with meaner mortals trained  
To strength or beauty, moulded to express  
Each the idea that rules him ; since no less  
He comprehends that function, but can still  
Embrace the others, take of might his fill  
With Richard as of grace with Palma, mix  
Their qualities, or for a moment fix  
On one ; abiding free meantime, uncramped  
By any partial organ, never stamped  
Strong, and to strength turning all energies—  
Wise, and restricted to becoming wise—  
That is, he loves not, nor possesses One  
Idea that, star-like over, lures him on  
To its exclusive purpose. “Fortunate !  
“ This flesh of mine ne’er strove to emulate  
“ A soul so various—took no casual mould  
“ Of the first fancy and, contracted, cold,  
“ Clogged her forever—soul averse to change  
“ As flesh : whereas flesh leaves soul free to range,  
“ Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,

“Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.  
“So, range, free soul!—who, by self-consciousness,  
“The last drop of all beauty dost express—  
“The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence  
“For thee: while for the world, that can dispense  
“Wonder on men who, themselves, wonder—make  
“A shift to love al second-hand, and take  
“For idols those who do but idolize,  
“Themselves,—the world that counts men strong or wise,  
“Who, themselves, court strength, wisdom,—it shall  
    bow  
“Surely in unexampled worship now,  
“Discerning me!”—

(Dear monarch, I beseech,

Notice how lamentably wide a breach  
Is here: discovering this, discover too  
What our poor world has possibly to do  
With it! As pigmy natures as you please—  
So much the better for you; take your ease,  
Look on, and laugh; style yourself God alone;  
Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone!  
All that is right enough: but why want us  
To know that you yourself know thus and thus?)  
“The world shall bow to me conceiving all  
“Man’s life, who see its blisses, great and small,  
“Afar—not tasting any; no machine

“ To exercise my utmost will is mine :  
“ Be mine mere consciousness ! Let men perceive  
“ What I could do, a mastery believe,  
“ Asserted and established to the throng  
“ By their selected evidence of song  
· Which now shall prove, whate'er they are, or seek  
“ To be, I am--whose words, not actions speak,  
‘ Who change no standards of perfection, vex  
“ With no strange forms created to perplex,  
“ But just perform their bidding and no more,  
“ At their own satiating-point give o'er,  
“ While each shall love in me the love that leads  
“ His soul to power's perfection.” Song, not deeds,  
(For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook  
Mankind no other organ ; he would look  
For not another channel to dispense  
His own volition by, receive men's sense  
Of its supremacy—would live content,  
Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent.  
Nor should, for instance, strength an outlet seek  
And, striving, be admired : nor grace bespeak  
Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes :  
Nor wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods ;  
But he would give and take on song's one point.  
Like some huge throbbing stone that, poised a-joint,  
Sounds, to affect on its basaltic bed,

Must sue in just one accent ; tempests shed  
Thunder, and raves the windstorm : only let  
That key by any little noise be set—  
The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch  
On that, the hungry curlew chance to scratch  
Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,  
However loud, however low—all lift  
The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.

Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,  
And this, for his, will hardly interfere !  
Its businesses in blood and blaze this year  
But wile the hour away—a pastime slight  
Till he shall step upon the platform : right !  
And, now thus much is settled, cast in rough,  
Proved feasible, be counselled ' thought enough,—  
Slumber, Sordello ! any day will serve :  
Were it a less digested plan ! how swerve  
To-morrow ? Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes,  
And watch the soaring hawk there ! Life escapes  
.Merrily thus.

He thoroughly read o'er  
His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,  
Praying him visit Mantua and supply  
A famished world.

The evening star was high  
When he reached Mantua, but his fame arrived

Before him : friends applauded, foes connived,  
And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest  
Angels, and all these angels would be blest  
Supremely by a song—the thrice-renowned  
Goito-manufacture. Then he found  
(Casting about to satisfy the crowd)  
That happy vehicle, so late allowed,  
A sore annoyance ; 't was the song's effect  
He cared for, scarce the song itself: reflect !  
In the past life, what might be singing's use?  
Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse  
Praise, not the toilsome process which procured  
That praise, enticed Apollo : dreams abjured,  
No overleaping means for ends—take both  
For granted or take neither ! I am loth  
To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's ;  
But Naddo, chuckling, bade competitors  
Go pine ; “the master certes meant to waste  
“No effort, cautiously had probed the taste  
“He 'd please anon : true bard, in short,—disturb  
“His title if they could ; nor spur nor curb,  
“Fancy nor reason, wanting in him ; whence  
“The staple of his verses, common sense :  
“He built on man's broad nature—gift of gifts,  
“That power to build ! The world contented shifts  
“With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort

“ Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort  
“ Its poet-soul—that’s, after all, a freak  
“ (The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)  
“ With our herd’s stupid sterling happiness  
“ So plainly incompatible that—yes—  
“ Yes—should a son of his improve the breed  
“ And turn out poet, he were cursed indeed!”  
“ Well, there’s Goito and its woods anon,  
“ If the worst happen; best go stoutly on  
“ Now!” thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet!

You pother with your glossaries to get  
A notion of the Troubadour’s intent  
In rondel, tenzon, virlai or sirvent—  
Much as you study arras how to twirl  
His angelot, plaything of page and girl  
Once; but you surely reach, at last,—or, no!  
Never quite reach what struck the people so,  
As from the welter of their time he drew  
Its elements successively to view,  
Followed all actions backward on their course,  
And catching up, unmingled at the source,  
Such a strength, such a weakness, added then  
A touch or two, and turned them into men.  
Virtue took form, nor vice refused a shape;  
Here heaven opened, there was hell agape,

As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,  
Sinner the other flared portentous by  
A greedy people. Then why stop, surprised  
At his success? The scheme was realized  
Too suddenly in one respect: a crowd  
Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud  
To speak, delicious homage to receive,  
The woman's breath to feel upon his sleeve,  
Who said, "But Anafest—why asks he less  
"Than Lucio, in your verses? how confess,  
"It seemed too much but yestereve!"—the youth,  
Who bade him earnestly, "Avow the truth!  
"You love Bianca, surely, from your song;  
"I knew I was unworthy!"—soft or strong,  
In poured such tributes ere he had arranged  
Ethereal ways to take them, sorted, changed,  
Digested. Courted thus at unawares,  
In spite of his pretensions and his cares,  
He caught himself shamefully hankering  
After the obvious petty joys that spring  
From true life, fain relinquish pedestal  
And condescend with pleasures—one and all  
To be renounced, no doubt; for, thus to chain  
Himself to single joys and so refrain  
From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure,  
His prime design; each joy must he abjure  
Even for love of it.

He laughed : what sage  
But perishes if from his magic page  
He look because, at the first line, a proof  
'T was heard salutes him from the cavern roof?  
"On ! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,  
"To the day's task ; compel your slave provide  
"Its utmost at the soonest ; turn the leaf  
"Thoroughly conned. These lays of yours, in brief—  
"Cannot men bear, now, something better?—fly  
"A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry  
"Of essences? the period sure has ceased  
"For such : present us with ourselves, at least,  
"Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates  
"Made flesh : wait not!"

Awhile the poet waits

However. The first trial was enough :  
He left imagining, to try the stuff  
That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe  
Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe  
To reach the light—his Language. How he sought  
The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought  
That Language,—welding words into the crude  
Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude  
Armour was hammered out, in time to be  
Approved beyond the Roman panoply  
Melted to make it,—boots not. This obtained

With some ado, no obstacle remained  
To using it; accordingly he took  
An action with its actors, quite forsook  
Himself to live in each, returned anon  
With the result—a creature, and, by one  
And one, proceeded leisurely to equip  
Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.  
“ Accomplished! Listen, Mantuans!” Fond essay!  
Piece after piece that armour broke away,  
Because perceptions whole, like that he sought  
To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought  
As language: thought may take perception’s place  
But hardly co-exist in any case,  
Being its mere presentment—of the whole  
By parts, the simultaneous and the sole  
By the successive and the many. Lacks  
The crowd perception? painfully it tacks  
Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,  
Has rent perception into: it’s to clutch  
And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,  
Destroy: as hard, then, to obtain a Muse  
As to become Apollo. “ For the rest,  
“ E’en if some wondrous vehicle expressed  
“ The whole dream, what impertinence in me  
“ So to express it, who myself can be  
“ The dream! nor, on the other hand, are those

“ I sing to, over-likely to suppose  
“ A higher than the highest I present  
“ Now, which they praise already : be content  
“ Both parties, rather—they with the old verse,  
“ And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse !”  
A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings  
The angel, sparkles off his mail, which rings  
Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps ;  
So might Apollo from the sudden corpse  
Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.  
He set to celebrating the exploits  
Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.

Then came

The world's revenge : their pleasure, now his aim  
Merely,—what was it? “ Not to play the fool  
“ So much as learn our lesson in your school ! ”  
Replied the world. He found that, every time  
He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,  
His auditory recognized no jot  
As he intended, and, mistaking not  
Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce  
Sufficient to believe him—all, at once.  
His will . . . conceive it caring for his will !  
—Mantuans, the main of them, admiring still  
How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,  
Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)

His fingers' ends ; while past the praise-tide swept  
To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept :  
The true meed for true merit !—his abates  
Into a sort he most repudiates,  
And on them angrily he turns. Who were  
The Mantuans, after all, that he should care  
About their recognition, ay or no ? ‘  
In spite of the convention months ago,  
(Why blink the truth?) was not he forced to help  
This same ungrateful audience, every whelp  
Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers  
With the bright band of old Goito years,  
As erst he toiled for flower or tree? Why, there  
Sat Palma ! Adelaide's funereal hair  
Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed  
A fairy dust upon that multitude,  
Although he feigned to take them by themselves ;  
His giants dignified those puny elves,  
Sublimed their faint applause. In short, he found  
Himself still footing a delusive round,  
Remote as ever from the self-display  
He meant to compass, hampered every way  
By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then  
Continue, make believe to find in men  
A use he found not?

Weeks, months, years went by

And lo, Sordello vanished utterly,  
Sundered in twain ; each spectral part at strife  
With each ; one jarred against another life ;  
The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man—  
Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran  
Here, there : let slip no opportunities  
As pitiful, forsooth<sup>b</sup>, beside the prize  
To drop on him some no-time and acquit  
His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit—  
That waiving any compromise between  
No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen  
Beyond most methods)—of incurring scoff  
From the Man-portion—not to be put off  
With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme,  
Though ne'er so bright. Who sauntered forth in dream,  
Dressed any how, nor waited mystic frames,  
Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,  
But just his sorry self?—who yet might be  
Sorrier for aught he in reality  
Achieved, so pinioned Man's the Poet-part,  
Fondling, in turn of fancy, verse ; the Art  
Developing his soul a thousand ways—  
Potent, by its assistance, to amaze  
The multitude with majesties, convince  
Each sort of nature that the nature's prince  
Accosted it. Language, the makeshift, grew .

Into a bravest of expedients, too ;  
Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown  
Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone  
Sufficed. While, out of dream, his day's work went  
To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—  
So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge  
Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge  
A minute's toil that missed its due reward !  
But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,  
John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,  
That on the sea, with, open in his hand,  
A bitter-sweetling of a book—was gone.

Then, if internal struggles to be one,  
Which frittered him incessantly piecemeal,  
Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real  
Intruding Mantuans ! ever with some call  
To action while he pondered, once for all,  
Which looked the easier effort—to pursue  
This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through  
The present ill-appreciated stage  
Of self-revealment, and compel the age  
Know him—or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake  
From out his lethargy and nobly shake  
Off timid habits of denial, mix  
With men, enjoy like men. Ere he could fix  
On aught, in rushed the Mantuans ; much they cared

For his perplexity ! Thus unprepared,  
The obvious if not only shelter lay  
In deeds, the dull conventions of his day  
Prescribed the like of him : why not be glad  
'T is settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,  
Submits to this and that established rule?  
Let Vidal change, or any other fool,  
His murrey-coloured robe for filamot,  
And crop his hair ; too skin-deep, is it not,  
Such vigour? Then, a sorrow to the heart,  
His talk ! Whatever topics they might start  
Had to be groped for in his consciousness  
Straight, and as straight delivered them by guess.  
Only obliged to ask himself, " What was,"  
A speedy answer followed ; but, alas,  
One of God's large ones, tardy to condense  
Itself into a period ; answers whence  
A tangle of conclusions must be stripped  
At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipped,  
They matched rare specimens the Mantuan flock  
Regaled him with, each talker from his stock  
Of sorted-o'er opinions, every stage,  
Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,  
Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,  
Sweet-sour, all tastes to take : a practice which  
He too had not impossibly attained,

Once either of those fancy-flights restrained ;  
(For, at conjecture how might words appear  
To others, playing there what happened here,  
And occupied abroad by what he spurned  
At home, 't was slipped, the occasion he returned  
To seize :) he 'd strike that lyre adroitly—speech,  
Would but a twenty-cubit plectre reach ;  
A clever hand, consummate instrument,  
Were both brought close ; each excellency went  
For nothing, else. The question Naddo asked,  
Had just a lifetime moderately tasked  
To answer, Naddo's fashion. More disgust  
And more : why move his soul, since move it must  
At minute's notice or as good it failed  
To move at all? The end was, he retailed  
Some ready-made opinion, put to use  
This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce  
Gestures and tones—at any folly caught  
Serving to finish with, nor too much sought  
If false or true 't was spoken ; praise and blame  
Of what he said grew pretty nigh the same  
—Meantime awards to meantime acts : his soul,  
Unequal to the compassing a whole,  
Saw, in a tenth part, less and less to strive  
About. And as for men in turn . . . contrive  
Who could to take eternal interest

In them, so hate the worst, so love the best:  
Though, in pursuance of his passive plan,  
He hailed, decried, the proper way.

## As Man

So figured he ; and how as Poet? Verse  
Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,  
That his poor piece of daily work to do  
Was—not sink under any rivals ; who  
Loudly and long enough, without these qualms,  
Turned, from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,  
To Plara's sonnets spoilt by toying with,  
“ As knops that stud some al mug to the pith  
“ Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse  
“ Than pursèd eyelids of a river-horse  
“ Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the breese”—  
*Gadfly*, that is. He might compete with these !  
But—but—

“ Observe a pompion-twine afloat ;  
“ Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat !  
“ Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,  
“ The entire surface of the pool to boot.  
“ So could I pluck a cup, put in one song  
“ A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,  
“ Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.  
“ How should externals satisfy my soul ? ”  
“ Why that 's precise the error Squarcialupe ”

(Hazarded Naddo) "finds ; ' the man can't stoop  
" 'To sing us out,' quoth he, 'a mere romance ;  
" 'He 'd fain do better than the best, enhance  
" 'The subjects' rarity, work problems out  
" 'Therewith.' Now, you 're a bard, a bard past doubt,  
" And no philosopher ; why introduce  
" Crotchetts like these? fine, surely, but no use  
" In poetry—which still must be, to strike,  
" Based upon common sense ; there 's nothing like  
" Appealing to our nature ! what beside  
" Was your first poetry? No tricks were tried  
" In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes !  
" 'The man,' said we, 'tells his own joys and woes :  
" 'We 'll trust him.' Would you have your songs endure ?  
" Build on the human heart!—why, to be sure  
" Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs,  
" Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares  
" To build on ! Central peace, mother of strength,  
" That 's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,  
" Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do  
" When they have got their calm ! And is it true,  
" Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?  
" Perhaps. But these are matters one may probe  
" Too deeply for poetic purposes :  
" Rather select a theory that . . . yes,  
" Laugh ! what does that prove?—stations you midway

“And saves some little o'er-refining. Nay,  
“That's rank injustice done me! I restrict  
“The poet? Don't I hold the poet picked  
“Out of a host of warriors, statesmen . . . did  
“I tell you? Very like! As well you hid  
“That sense of power, you have! True bards believe  
“All able to achieve what they achieve—  
“That is, just nothing—in one point abide  
“Profounder simpletons than all beside.  
“Oh, ay! The knowledge that you are a bard  
“Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward!”  
So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe  
Of genius-hauntings—how shall I describe  
What grubs or nips or rubs or rips—your louse  
For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,  
Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,  
Picking a sustenance from wear and tear  
By implements it sedulous employs  
To undertake, lay down, mete out, o'er-toise  
Sordello? Fifty creepers to elude  
At once! They settled staunchly; shame ensued:  
Behold the monarch of mankind succumb  
To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,  
As Naddo styled it! 'T was not worth oppose  
The matter of a moment, gainsay those  
He aimed at getting rid of; better think

Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink  
Back expeditiously to his safe place,  
And chew the cud—what he and what his race  
Were really, each of them. Yet even this  
Conformity was partial. He would miss  
Some point, brought into contact with them ere  
Assured in what small segment of the sphere  
Of his existence they attended him ;  
Whence blunders, falsehoods rectified—a grim  
List—slur it over ! How? If dreams were tried,  
His will swayed sicklily from side to side,  
Nor merely neutralized his waking act  
But tended e'en in fancy to distract  
The intermediate will, the choice of means.  
He lost the art of dreaming : Mantuan scenes  
Supplied a baron, say, he sang before,  
Handsomely reckless, full to running-o'er  
Of gallantries ; “abjure the soul, content  
“With body, therefore !” Scarcely had he bent  
Himself in dream thus low, when matter fast  
Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast  
And task it duly ; by advances slight,  
The simple stuff becoming composite,  
Count Lori grew Apollo : best recall  
His fancy ! Then would some rough peasant-Paul,  
Like those old Ecelin confers with, glance

His gay apparel o'er ; that countenance  
Gathered his shattered fancies into one,  
And, body clean abolished, soul alone  
Sufficed the grey Paulician : by and by,  
To balance the ethereality,  
Passions were needed ; foiled he sank again.

Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('t is time explain)  
Because a sudden sickness set it free  
From Adelaide. Missing the mother-bee,  
Her mountain-hive Romano swarmed ; at once  
A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons  
Blackened the valley. "I am sick too, old,  
" Half-crazed I think ; what good 's the Kaiser's gold  
" To such an one? God help me! for I catch  
" My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch—  
" ' He bears that double breastplate on,' they say,  
" ' So many minutes less than yesterday !'  
" Beside, Monk Hilary is on his knees  
" Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please  
" Exact a punishment for many things  
" You know, and some you never knew ; which brings  
" To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix  
" And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's  
" And Ecelin's betrothed ; the Count himself  
" Must get my Palma : Ghibellin and Guelf  
" Mean to embrace each other." So began

Romano's missive to his fighting man  
Taurello—on the Tuscan's death, away  
With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay  
Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap  
Out of Vesuvius' throat, like this mishap  
Startled him. "That accursed Vicenza ! I  
"Absent, and she selects this time to die !  
"Ho, fellows, for Vicenza !" Half a score  
Of horses ridden dead, he stood before  
Romano in his reeking spurs : too late—  
"Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,"  
The chieftain stammered ; "let me die in peace—  
"Forget me ! Was it I who craved increase  
"Of rule? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst  
"Against the Father: as you found me first  
"So leave me now. Forgive me ! Palma, sure,  
"Is at Goito still. Retain that lure—  
"Only be pacified!"

The country rung  
With such a piece of news : on every tongue,  
How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,  
Had done a long day's service, so, might doff  
The green and yellow, and recover breath  
At Mantua, whither,—since Retrude's death,  
(The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride  
From Otho's house, he carried to reside

At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile  
A structure worthy her imperial style,  
The gardens raise, the statues there enshrine,  
She never lived to see)—although his line  
Was ancient in her archives and she took  
A pride in him, that city, nor forsook  
Her child when he forsook himself and spent  
A prowess on Romano surely meant  
For his own growth—whither he ne'er resorts  
If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)  
With Ecelin. So, forward in a trice  
Were shows to greet him. “Take a friend's advice,”  
Quoth Naddo to Sordello, “nor be rash  
“Because your rivals (nothing can abash  
“Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best  
“To sound the great man's welcome; 't is a test,  
“Remember! Strojavacca looks asquint,  
“The rough fat sloven; and there's plenty hint  
“Your pinions have received of late a shock—  
“Outsoar them, cobswan of the silver flock!  
“Sing well!” A signal wonder, song's no whit  
Facilitated.

Fast the minutes flit;  
Another day, Sordello finds, will bring  
The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing;  
So, a last shift, quits Mantua—slow, alone:

Out of that aching brain, a very stone,  
Song must be struck. What occupies that front?  
Just how he was more awkward than his wont  
The night before, when Naldo, who had seen  
Taurello on his progress, praised the mien  
For dignity no crosses could affect—  
Such was a joy, and might not he detect  
A satisfaction if established joys  
Were proved imposture? Poetry annoys  
Its utmost: wherefore fret? Verses may come  
Or keep away! And thus he wandered, dumb  
Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,  
On a blind hill-top: down the gorge he went,  
Yielding himself up as to an embrace.  
The moon came out; like features of a face,  
A querulous fraternity of pines,  
Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines  
Also came out, made gradually up  
The picture; 't was Goito's mountain-cup  
And castle. He had dropped through one defile  
He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile  
Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapped  
Him wholly. 'T was Apollo now they lapped,  
Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant  
To wear his soul away in discontent,  
Brooding on fortune's malice. Heart and brain

Swelled ; he expanded to himself again,  
As some thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail,  
Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail  
Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth,  
—Suffered remain just as it sprung, to soothe  
The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet  
Well in her chilly green-glazed minaret,—  
When rooted up, the sunny day she died,  
And flung into the common court beside  
Its parent tree. Come home, Sordello ! Soon  
Was he low muttering, beneath the moon,  
Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore,—  
Since from the purpose, he maintained before,  
Only resulted wailing and hot tears.  
Ah, the slim castle ! dwindled of late years,  
But more mysterious ; gone to ruin—trails  
Of vine through every loop-hole. Nought avails  
The night as, torch in hand, he must explore  
The maple chamber : did I say, its floor  
Was made of intersecting cedar beams?  
Worn now with gaps so large, there blew cold  
streams  
Of air quite from the dungeon ; lay your ear  
Close and 't is like, one after one, you hear  
In the blind darkness water drop. The nests  
And nooks retain their long ranged vesture-chests

Empty and smelling of the iris root  
The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit  
Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,  
Said the remaining women. Last, he lay  
Beside the Carian group reserved and still.

The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,  
Had been at the commencement prov'd unfit ;  
That for Demonstrating, Reflecting it,  
Mankind—no fitter : was the Will Itself  
In fault?

His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf  
Beside the youngest marble maid awhile ;  
Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile,  
“I shall be king again !” as he withdrew  
The envied scarf ; into the font he threw  
His crown

Next day, no poet ! “Wherefore ?” asked  
Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs, masked  
As devils, ended ; “don't a song come next ?”  
The master of the pageant looked perplexed  
Till Naldo's whisper came to his relief.  
“ His Highness knew what poets were : in brief,  
“ Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right  
“ To peevishness, caprice ? or, call it spite,  
“ One must receive their nature in its length  
“ And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength !”

—So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,  
The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,  
Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,  
And nodded that the bull-bait might begin.

BOOK THE THIRD.  
*\**

AND the font took them : let our laurels lie !  
Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly  
Because once more Goito gets, once more,  
Sordello to itself ! A dream is o'er,  
And the suspended life begins anew ;  
Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue  
That cheek's distortion ! Nature's strict embrace,  
Putting aside the past, shall soon efface  
Its print as well—factitious humours grown  
Over the true—loves, hatreds not his own—  
And turn him pure as some forgotten vest  
Woven of painted byssus, silkiest  
Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,  
Left welter where a trireme let it slip  
I' the sea, and vexed a satrap ; so the stain  
O' the world forsakes Sordello, with its pain,  
Its pleasure : how the tinct loosening escapes,  
Cloud after cloud ! Mantua's familiar shapes

Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,  
Men, women, and the pathos and the wit,  
Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh  
For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die.  
The last face glances through the eglantines,  
The last voice murmurs, 'twixt the blossomed vines,  
Of Men, of that machine supplied by thought  
To compass self-perception with, he sought  
By forcing half himself—an insane pulse  
Of a god's blood, on clay it could convulse,  
Never transmute—on human sights and sounds,  
To watch the other half with ; irksome bounds  
It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed  
Forever. Better sure be unrevealed  
Than part revealed : Sordello well or ill  
Is finished : then what further use of Will,  
Point in the prime idea not realized,  
An oversight? inordinately prized,  
No less, and pampered with enough of each  
Delight to prove the whole above its reach.  
“To need become all natures, yet retain  
“The law of my own nature—to remain  
“Myself, yet yearn . . . as if that chestnut, think,  
“Should yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,  
“Or those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs stanch  
“March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch !

“ Will and the means to show will, great and small,  
“ Material, spiritual,—abjure them all  
“ Save any so distinct, they may be left  
“ To amuse, not tempt become ! and, thus bereft,  
“ Just as I first was fashioned would I be !  
“ Nor, moon, is it Apollo now, but me  
“ Thou visitest to comfort and befriend !  
“ Swim thou into my heart, and there an end,  
“ Since I possess thee !—nay, thus shut mine eyes  
“ And know, quite know, by this heart’s fall and rise,  
“ When thou dost bury thee in clouds, and when  
“ Out-standest : wherefore practise upon men  
“ To make that plainer to myself ?”

Slide here

Over a sweet and solitary year  
Wasted ; or simply notice change in him—  
How eyes, once with exploring bright, grew dim  
And satiate with receiving. Some distress  
Was caused, too, by a sort of consciousness  
Under the imbecility,—nought kept  
That down ; he slept, but was aware he slept,  
So, frustrated : as who brainsick made pact  
Erst with the overhanging cataract  
To deafen him, yet still distinguished plain  
His own blood’s measured clicking at his brain.  
To finish. One declining Autumn day—

Few birds about the heaven chill and grey,  
No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods—  
He sauntered home complacently, their moods  
According, his and nature's. Every spark  
Of Mantua life was trodden out; so dark  
The embers, that the Troubadour, who sung  
Hundreds of songs, forgot, its trick his tongue,  
Its craft his brain, how either brought to pass  
Singing at all; that faculty might class  
With ahoy of Apollo's now. The year  
Began to find its early promise sere  
As well. Thus beauty vanishes, thus stone  
Outlingers flesh: nature's and his youth gone,  
They left the world to you, and wished you joy.  
When, stopping his benevolent employ,  
A presage shuddered through the welkin; harsh  
The earth's remonstrance followed. 'T was the marsh  
Gone of a sudden. Mincio, in its place,  
Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,  
And, where the mists broke up immense and white  
I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light  
Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.  
And here was nature, bound by the same bars  
Of fate with him!

“No! youth once gone is gone:  
“Deeds, let escape, are never to be done.

“ Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year ; for us—  
“ Oh forfeit I unalterably thus  
“ My chance? nor two lives wait me, this to spend,  
“ Learning save that? Nature has time, may mend  
“ Mistake, she knows occasion will recur ;  
“ Landslip or seabreach, how affects it her  
“ With her magnificent resources?—  
“ Must perish once and perish utterly.  
“ Not any strollings now at even-close  
“ Down the field-path, Sordello ! by thorn-rows  
“ Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire  
“ And dew, outlining the black cypress’ spire  
“ She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first  
“ Woo her, the snow-month through, but ere she durst  
“ Answer ’t was April. Linden-flower-time-long  
“ Her eyes were on the ground ; ’t is July, strong  
“ Now ; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm  
“ The woodside, here or by the village elm  
“ That holds the moon, she meets you, somewhat pale,  
“ But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil  
“ And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)  
“ Of love, heart’s love, your heart’s love that endures  
“ Till death. Tush ! No mad mixing with the rout  
“ Of haggard ribalds wandering about  
“ The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house  
“ Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse,

“Parading,—to the gay Palermitan,  
“Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans  
“Nuocera holds,—those tall grave dazzling Norse,  
“High-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the  
    morse,  
“Queens of the caves of jet stalactites,  
“He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,  
“The blind night seas without a saving star,  
“And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,  
“Sordello!—here, mollitious alcoves gilt  
“Superb as Byzant domes that devils built!  
“—Ah, Byzant, there again! no chance to go  
“Ever like august cheery Dandolo,  
“Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,  
“Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,  
“Through vanquished Byzant where friends note for him  
“What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,  
“T were fittest he transport to Venice’ Square—  
“Flattered and promised life to touch them there  
“Soon, by those fervid sons of senators!  
“No more lifes, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars!  
“Ah, fragments of a whole ordained to be,  
“Points in the life I waited! what are ye  
“But roundels of a ladder which appeared  
“Awhile the very platform it was reared  
“To lift me on?—that happiness I find

“Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind  
“Instinct which bade forego you all unless  
“Ye led me past yourselves. Ay, happiness  
“Awaited me; the way life should be used  
“Was to acquire, and deeds like you conducted  
“To teach it by a self-revealment, deemed  
“Life’s very use, so long! Whatever seemed  
“Progress to that, was pleasure; aught that stayed  
“My reaching it—no pleasure. I have laid  
“The ladder down; I climb not; still, aloft  
“The platform stretches! Blisses strong and soft,  
“I dared not entertain, elude me; yet  
“Never of what they promised could I get  
“A glimpse till now! The common sort, the crowd,  
“Exist, perceive; with Being are endowed,  
“However slight, distinct from what they See,  
“However bounded; Happiness must be,  
“To feed the first by gleanings from the last,  
“Attain its qualities, and slow or fast  
“Become what they behold; such peace-in-strife,  
“By transmutation, is the Use of Life,  
“The Alien turning Native to the soul  
“Or body—which instructs me; I am whole  
“There and demand a Palma; had the world  
“Been from my soul to a like distance hurled,  
“’T were Happiness to make it one with me:

“Whereas I must, ere I begin to Be,  
“Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend  
“In spirit now; and this done, what’s to blend  
“With? Nought is Alien in the world—my Will  
“Owns all already; yet can turn it—still  
“Less—Native, since my Means to correspond  
“With Will are so unworthy, ‘t was my bond  
“To tread the very joys that tantalize  
“Most now, into a grave, never to rise.  
“I die then! Will the rest agree to die?  
“Next Age or no? Shall its Sordello try  
“Clue after clue, and catch at last the clue  
“I miss?—that’s underneath my finger too,  
“Twice, thrice a day, perhaps,—some yearning traced  
“Deeper, some petty consequence embraced  
“Closer! Why fled I Mantua, then?—complained  
“So much my Will was fettered, yet remained  
“Content within a tether half the range  
“I could assign it?—able to exchange  
“My ignorance (I felt) for knowledge, and  
“Idle because I could thus understand—  
“Could e’en have penetrated to its core  
“Our mortal mystery, yet—fool—forbore,  
“Preferred elaborating in the dark  
“My casual stuff, by any wretched spark  
“Born of my predecessors, though one stroke

“ Of mine had brought the flame forth ! Mantua’s yoke,  
“ My minstrel’s-trade, was to behold mankind,—  
“ My own concern was just to bring my mind  
“ Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,  
“ Each object suffered stifle in the mist  
“ Which hazard, custom, blindness interpose  
“ Betwixt things and myself.” •

Whereat he rose.

The level wind carried above the firs  
Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,  
Onward.

“ Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,  
“ Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops  
“ Under a humid finger ; while there fleets,  
“ Outside the screen, a pageant time repeats  
“ Never again ! To be deposed, immured  
“ Clandestinely—still petted, still assured  
“ To govern were fatiguing work—the Sight  
“ Fleeting meanwhile ! ’T is noontide : wreak ere night  
“ Somehow my will upon it, rather ! Slake  
“ This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take  
“ That serves ! A blasted bud displays you, torn,  
“ Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn ;  
“ But who divines what glory coats o’erclasp  
“ Of the bulb dormant in the mummy’s grasp  
“ Taurello sent ? ” . . .

“ Taurello? Palma sent  
“ Your Trouvere,” (Naddo interposing leant  
Over the lost bard’s shoulder)—“ and, believe,  
“ You cannot more reluctantly receive  
“ Than I pronounce her message: we depart  
“ Together. What avail a poet’s heart  
“ Verona’s pomps and gauds? five blades of grass  
“ Suffice him. News? Why, where your marish was,  
“ On its mud-banks smoke rises after smoke  
“ I’ the valley, like a spout of hell new-broke.  
“ Oh, the world’s tidings! small your thanks, I guess,  
“ For them. The father of our Patroness,  
“ Has played Taurello an astounding trick,  
“ Parts between Ecelin and Alberic  
“ His wealth and goes into a convent: both  
“ Wed Guelfs: the Count and Palma plighted troth  
“ A week since at Verona: and they want  
“ You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chant  
“ Ere Richard storms Ferrara.” Then was told  
The tale from the beginning—how, made bold  
By Salinguerra’s absence, Guelfs had burned  
And pillaged till he unawares returned  
To take revenge: how Azzo and his friend  
Were doing their endeavour, how the end  
O’ the siege was nigh, and how the Count, released  
From further care, would with his marriage-feast

Inaugurate a new and better rule,  
Absorbing thus Romano.

“ Shall I school  
“ My master,” added Naddo, “ and suggest  
“ How you may clothe in a poetic vest  
“ These doings, at Verona? Your response  
“ To Palma! Wherefore jest? Depart at once?  
“ A good resolve! In truth, I hardly hoped  
“ So prompt an acquiescence. Have you groped  
“ Out wisdom in the wilds here?—thoughts may be  
“ Over-poetical for poetry.  
“ Pearl-white, you poets liken Palma’s neck;  
“ And yet what spoils an orient like some speck  
“ Of genuine white, turning its own white grey?  
“ You take me? Curse the cicala!”

One more day,  
One eve—appears Verona! Many a group,  
(You mind) instructed of the osprey’s swoop  
On lynx and ounce, was gathering—Christendom  
Sure to receive, whate’er the end was, from  
The evening’s purpose cheer or detriment,  
Since Friedrich only waited some event  
Like this, of Ghibellins establishing  
Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King  
Of Lombardy, he’d glad descend there, wage  
Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage

His barons from the burghers, and restore  
The rule of Charlemagne, broken of yore  
By Hildebrand.

I' the palace, each by each,  
Sordello sat and Palma : little speech  
At first in that dim closet, face with face  
(Despite the tumult in the market-place)  
Exchanging quick low laughters : now would rush  
Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,  
A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise—  
But for the most part their two histories  
Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.  
And so the night flew on with its alarms  
Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;  
“Now, Lady !” gasped he. Then arose the two  
And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.  
A balcony lay black beneath until  
Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, grey-haired men  
Came on it and harangued the people : then  
Sea-like that people surging to and fro  
Shouted, “ Hale forth the carroch—trumpets, ho,  
“ A flourish ! Run it in the ancient grooves !  
“ Back from the bell ! Hammer—that whom behoves  
“ May hear the League is up ! Peal—learn who list,  
“ Verona means not first of towns break tryst  
“ To-morrow with the League !”

Enough. Now turn—

Over the eastern cypresses : discern !

Is any beacon set a-glimmer?

Rang

The air with shouts that overpowered the clang

Of the incessant carroch, even : “ Haste—

“ The candle ’s at the gateway ! ere it waste,

“ Each soldier stand beside it, armed to march

“ With Tiso Sampier through the eastern arch ! ”

Ferrara’s succoured, Palma !

Once again

They sat together ; some strange thing in train

To say, so difficult was Palma’s place

In taking, with a coy fastidious grace

Like the bird’s flutter ere it fix and feed.

But when she felt she held her friend indeed

Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant

Her lessons ; telling of another want

Goito’s quiet nourished than his own ;

Palma—to serve him—to be served, alone

Importing ; Agnes’ milk so neutralized

The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised

If, while Sordello fain had captive led

Nature, in dream was Palma subjected

To some out-soul, which dawned not though she pined

Delaying, till its advent, heart and mind

Their life. "How dared I let expand the force  
"Within me, till some out-soul, whose resource  
"It grew for, should direct it? Every law  
"Of life, its every fitness, every flaw,  
"Must One determine whose corporeal shape  
"Would be no other than the prime escape  
"And revelation to me of a Will  
"Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable  
"Above, save at the point which, I should know,  
"Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow  
"So far, so much; as now it signified  
"Which earthly shape it henceforth chose my guide,  
"Whose mortal lip selected to declare  
"Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear  
"—The first of intimations, whom to love;  
"The next, how love him. Seemed that orb, above  
"The castle-covert and the mountain-close,  
"Slow in appearing?—if beneath it rose  
"Cravings, aversions,—did our green precinct  
"Take pride in me, at unawares distinct  
"With this or that endowment,—how, repressed  
"At once, such jetting power shrank to the rest!  
"Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave  
"My spirit thence unfitted to receive  
"The consummating spell?—that spell so near  
"Moreover! 'Waits he not the waking year?

“ His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe  
“ By this ; to welcome him, fresh runnels stripe  
“ The thawed ravines ; because of him, the wind  
“ Walks like a herald. I shall surely find  
“ Him now !”

“ And chief, that earnest April morn  
“ Of Richard’s Love-court, was it time, so worn  
“ And white my cheek, so idly my blood beat,  
“ Sitting that morn beside the Lady’s feet  
“ And saying as she prompted ; till outburst  
“ One face from all the faces. Not then first  
“ I knew it ; where in maple chamber glooms,  
“ Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate blooms,  
“ Advanced it ever ? Men’s acknowledgment  
“ Sanctioned my own : ’t was taken, Palma’s bent,—  
“ Sordello,—recognized, accepted.

“ Dumb

“ Sat she still scheming. Ecelin would come  
“ Gaunt, scared, ‘ Cesano baffles me,’ he ’d say :  
“ Better I fought it out, my father’s way !  
“ Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats,  
“ And you and your Taurello yonder !—what ’s  
“ Romano’s business there ?’ An hour’s concern  
“ To cure the froward Chief !—induce return  
“ As heartened from those overmeaning eyes,  
“ Wound up to persevere,—his enterprise

“ Marked out anew, its exigent of wit  
“ Appportioned,—she at liberty to sit  
“ And scheme against the next emergence, I—  
“ To covet her Taurello-sprite, made fly  
“ Or fold the wing—to con your horoscope  
“ For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope,  
“ Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness  
“ In blank smooth snow What semblance of success  
“ To any of my plans for making you  
“ Mine and Romano’s? Break the first wall through,  
“ Tread o’er the ruins of the Chief, supplant  
“ His sons beside, still, vainest were the vaunt:  
“ There, Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,  
“ And the insuperable Tuscan, here,  
“ Stay me! But one wild eve that Lady died  
“ In her lone chamber: only I beside:  
“ Taurello far at Naples, and my sire  
“ At Padua, Ecelin away in ire  
“ With Alberic. She held me thus—a clutch  
“ To make our spirits as our bodies touch—  
“ And so began flinging the past up heaps  
“ Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps  
“ Within her soul; deeds rose along with dreams,  
“ Fragments of many miserable schemes,  
“ Secrets, more secrets, then—no, not the last—  
“ ’Mongst others, like a casual trick o’ the past,

“ How . . . ay, she told me, gathering up her face,  
“ All left of it, into one arch-grimace  
“ To die with . . .

“ Friend, ‘t is gone ! but not the fear  
“ Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.  
“ Nor faltered voice, nor seemed hér heart grow weak  
“ When i’ the midst abrupt she ceased to speak  
“ —Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark !—for in  
“ Rushed o’ the very instant Ecelin  
“ (How summoned, who divines?)—looking as if  
“ He understood why Adelaide lay stiff  
“ Already in my arms ; for ‘ Girl, how must  
“ ‘ I manage Este in the matter thrust  
“ ‘ Upon me, how unravel your bad coil?—  
“ ‘ Since’ (he declared) ‘ t is on your brow—a soil  
“ ‘ Like hers there !’ then in the same breath, ‘ he  
lacked  
“ ‘ No counsel after all, had signed no pact  
“ ‘ With devils, nor was treason here or there,  
“ ‘ Goito or Vicenza, his affair :  
“ ‘ He buried it in Adelaide’s deep grave,  
“ ‘ Would begin life afresh, now,—would not slave  
“ ‘ For any Friedrich’s nor Taurello’s sake !  
“ ‘ What booted him to meddle or to make  
“ ‘ In Lombardy?’ And afterward I knew  
“ The meaning of his promise to undo

“ All she had done—why marriages were made,  
“ New friendships entered on, old followers paid  
“ With curses for their pains,—new friends’ amaze  
“ At height, when, passing out by Gate St. Blaise,  
“ He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head  
“ Over a friar’s neck,—‘ had vowed,’ he said,  
“ ‘ Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife  
“ ‘ And child were saved there, to bestow his life  
“ ‘ On God, his gettings on the Church.’

## “ Exiled

“ Within Goito, still one dream beguiled  
“ My days and nights ; ’t was found, the orb I sought  
“ To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut,  
“ No other : but how serve it?—authorize  
“ You and Romano mingle destinies?  
“ And straight Romano’s angel stood beside  
“ Me who had else been Boniface’s bride,  
“ For Salinguerra ’t was, with neck low bent,  
“ And voice lightened to music, (as he meant  
“ To learn, not teach me,) who withdrew the pall  
“ From the dead past and straight revived it all,  
“ Making me see how first Romano waxed,  
“ Wherefore he waned now, why, if I relaxed  
“ My grasp (even I !) would drop a thing effete,  
“ Frayed by itself, unequal to complete  
“ Its course, and counting every step astray

“ A gain so much. Romano, every way  
“ Stable, a Lombard House now—why start back  
“ Into the very outset of its track?  
“ This patching principle which late allied  
“ Our House with other Houses—what beside  
“ Concerned the apparition, the first Knight  
“ Who followed Conrad hither in such plight  
“ His utmost wealth was summed in his one steed?  
“ For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed  
“ A task, in the beginning hazardous  
“ To him as ever task can be to us;  
“ But did the weather-beaten thief despair  
“ When first our crystal cincture of warm air  
“ That binds the Trevisan,—as its spice-belt  
“ (Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt,—  
“ Furtive he pierced, and Este was to face—  
“ Despaired Saponian strength of Lombard grace?  
“ Tried he at making surer aught made sure,  
“ Maturing what already was mature?  
“ No; his heart prompted Ecelo, ‘ Confront  
“ ‘ Este, inspect yourself. What’s nature? Wont.  
“ Discard three-parts your nature, and adopt  
“ ‘ The rest as an advantage! ’ Old strength propped  
“ The man who first grew Podestà among  
“ The Vicentines, no less than, while there sprung  
“ His palace up in Padua like a threat,

“ Their noblest spied a grace, unnoticed yet  
“ In Conrad’s crew. Thus far the object gained,  
“ Romano was established—has remained—  
“ “ For are you not Italian, truly peers  
“ “ With Este? *Asso* better soothes our ears  
“ “ Than *Alberic?*\* or is this lion’s-crine  
“ “ From over-mounts’ (this yellow hair of mine)  
“ “ So weak a graft on Agnes Este’s stock?’  
“ (Thus went he on with something of a mock)  
“ “ Wherefore recoil, then, from the very fate  
“ “ Conceded you, refuse to imitate  
“ “ Your model farther? Este long since left  
“ “ Being mere Este: as a blade its heft,  
“ “ Este required the Pope to further him:  
“ “ And you, the Kaiser—whom your father’s whim  
“ “ Foregoes or, better, never shall forego  
“ “ If Palma dare pursue what Ecelo  
“ “ Commenced, but Ecelin desists from: just  
“ “ As Adelaide of Susa could intrust  
“ “ Her donative,—her Piedmont given the Pope,  
“ “ Her Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope  
“ “ Twixt France and Italy,—to the superb  
“ “ Matilda’s perfecting,—so, lest aught curb  
“ “ Our Adelaide’s great counter-project for  
“ “ Giving her Trentine to the Emperor  
“ “ With passage here from Germany,—shall you

“ ‘Take it,—my slender plodding talent, too !’

“ —Urged me Taurello with his half-smile

“ He

“ As Patron of the scattered family

“ Conveyed me to his Mantua, kept in bruit

“ Azzo’s alliances and Richard’s suit

“ Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,

“ ‘Nothing remains,’ Taurello said, ‘but wait

“ ‘Some rash procedure : Palma was the link,

“ ‘As Agnes’ child, between us, and they shrink

“ ‘From losing Palma : judge if we advance,

“ ‘Your father’s method, your inheritance !’

“ The day I was betrothed to Boniface

“ At Padua by Taurello’s self, took place

“ The outrage of the Ferrarese : again,

“ The day I sought Verona with the train

“ Agreed for,—by Taurello’s policy

“ Convicting Richard of the fault, since we

“ Were present to annul or to confirm,—

“ Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,

“ Quitted Verona for the siege.

“ And now

“ What glory may engird Sordello’s brow

“ Through this ? A month since at Oliero slunk

“ All that was Ecelin into a monk ;

“ But how could Salinguerra so forget

“ His liege of thirty years as grudge even yet  
“ One effort to recover him? He sent  
“ Forthwith the tidings of this last event  
“ To Ecelin—declared that he, despite  
“ The recent folly, recognized his right  
“ To order Salinguerra: ‘Should he wring  
“ ‘ Its uttermost advantage out, or fling  
“ ‘ This chance away? Or were his sons now Head  
“ ‘ O’ the House?’ Through me Taurello’s missive sped;  
“ My father’s answer will by me return.  
“ Behold! ‘For him,’ he writes, ‘no more concern  
“ ‘ With strife than, for his children, with fresh plots  
“ ‘ Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots  
“ ‘ For aye: Taurello shall no more subserve,  
“ ‘ Nor Ecelin impose.’ Lest this unnerve  
“ Taurello at this juncture, slack his grip  
“ Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip,—  
“ I, in his sons’ default (who, mating with  
“ Este, forsake Romano as the frith  
“ Its mainsea for that firmland, sea makes head  
“ Against) I stand, Romano,—in their stead  
“ Assume the station they desert, and give  
“ Still, as the Kaiser’s representative,  
“ Taurello licence he demands. Midnight—  
“ Morning—by noon to-morrow, making light  
“ Of the League’s issue, we, in some gay weed

“ Like yours, disguised together, may precede  
“ The arbitrators to Ferrara : reach  
“ Him, let Taurello’s noble accents teach  
“ The rest ! Then say if I have misconceived  
“ Your destiny, too readily believed  
“ The Kaiser’s cause your own !”

•And Palma’s fled.

Though no affirmative disturbs the head,  
A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o’er,  
Like the alighted planet Pollux wore,  
Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be  
Gate-vein of this heart’s blood of Lombardy,  
Soul of this body—to wield this aggregate  
Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate  
Though he should live—a centre of disgust  
Even—apart, core of the outward crust  
He vivifies, assimilates. For thus  
I bring Sordello to the rapturous  
Exclaim at the crowd’s cry, because one round  
Of life was quite accomplished ; and he found  
Not only that a soul, whate’er its might,  
Is insufficient to its own delight,  
Both in corporeal organs and in skill  
By means of such to body forth its Will—  
And, after, insufficient to apprise  
Men of that Will, oblige them recognize

The Hid by the Revealed—but that,—the last  
Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,—  
Will, he bade abdicate, which would not void  
The throne, might sit there, suffer he enjoyed  
Mankind, a varied and divine array  
Incapable of homage, the first way,  
Nor fit to render incidentally  
Tribute connived at, taken by the by,  
In joys. If thus with warrant to rescind  
The ignominious exile of mankind—  
Whose proper service, ascertained intact  
As yet, (to be by him themselves made act,  
Not watch Sordello acting each of them)  
Was to secure—if the true diadem  
Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank  
The wisdom of that golden Palma,—thank  
Verona's Lady in her citadel  
Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell :  
And truly when she left him, the sun reared  
A head like the first clamberer's who peered  
A-top the Capitol, his face on flame  
With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.  
Nor slight too much my rhymes—that spring, dispread,  
Dispart, disperse, lingering over head  
Like an escape of angels ! Rather say,  
My transcendental platan ! mounting gay

(An archimage so courts a novice-queen)  
 With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen  
 Laugh out, thick-foliaged next, a-shiver soon  
 With coloured buds, then glowing like the moon  
 One mild flame,—last a pause, a burst, and all  
 Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,  
 Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,  
 Ending the weird work prosecuted just  
 For her amusement ; he decrepit, stark,  
 Dozes ; her uncontrolled delight may mark  
 Apart—

Yet not so, surely never so  
 Only, as good my soul were suffered go  
 O'er the lagune : forth fare thee, put aside—  
 Entrance thy synod, as a god may glide  
 Out of the world he fills, and leave it mute  
 For myriad ages as we men compute,  
 Returning into it without a break  
 O' the consciousness ! They sleep, and I awake  
 O'er the lagune, being at Venice.

## Note,

In just such songs as Eglamor (say) wrote  
 With heart and soul and strength, for he believed  
 Himself achieving all to be achieved  
 By singer—in such songs you find alone  
 Completeness, judge the song and singer one,

And either purpose answered, his in it  
Or its in him : while from true works (to wit  
Sordello's dream-performances that will  
Never be more than dreamed) escapes there still  
Some proof, the singer's proper life was 'neath  
The life his song exhibits, this a sheath  
To that ; a passion and a knowledge far  
Transcending these, majestic as they are,  
Smouldered ; his lay was but an episode  
In the bard's life : which evidence you owed  
To some slight weariness, some looking-off  
Or start-away. The childish skit or scoff  
In "Charlemagne," (his poem, dreamed divine  
In every point except one silly line  
About the restiff daughters)—what may lurk  
In that? " My life commenced before this work,"  
(So I interpret the significance  
Of the bard's start aside and look askance)  
" My life continues after : on I fare  
" With no more stopping, possibly, no care  
" To note the undercurrent, the why and how,  
" Where, when, o' the deeper life, as thus just now.  
" But, silent, shall I cease to live? Alas  
" For you ! who sigh, ' When shall it come to pass  
" ' We read that story? How will he compress  
" ' The future gains, his life's true business,

“ ‘ Into the better lay which—that one flout,  
“ ‘ Howe’er inopportune it be, lets out—  
“ ‘ Engrosses him already, though professed  
“ ‘ To meditate with us eternal rest,  
“ ‘ And partnership in all his life has found?’ ”  
“ T is but a sailor’s promise, weather-bound :  
“ Strike sail, slip cable, here the bark be moored  
“ For once, the awning stretched, the poles assured !  
“ Noontide above ; except the wave’s crisp dash,  
“ Or buzz of colibri, or tortoise’ splash,  
“ The margin ’s silent : out with every spoil  
“ Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,  
“ This serpent of a river to his head  
“ I’ the midst ! Admire each treasure, as we spread  
“ The bank, to help us tell our history  
“ Aright : give ear, endeavour to descry  
“ The groves of giant rushes, how they grew  
“ Like demons’ endlong tresses we sailed through,  
“ What mountains yawned, forests to give us vent  
“ Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went  
“ Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest  
“ The springing of a land-wind from the West !”  
—Wherefore? Ah yes, you frolic it to-day !  
To-morrow, and, the pageant moved away  
Down to the poorest tent-pole, we and you  
Part company : no other may pursue

Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate  
Intends, if triumph or decline await  
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.

I muse this on a ruined palace-step  
At Venice: why should I break off, nor sit  
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit  
England gave birth to? Who's adorable  
Enough reclaim a — no Sordello's Will  
Alack!—be queen to me? That Bassanese  
Busied among her smoking fruit-boats? These  
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo  
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico  
Not prettier, bind June lilies into sheaves  
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves  
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal? Ah, beneath  
The cool arch stoops she, brownest cheek! Her wreath  
Endures a month—a half-month—if I make  
A queen of her, continue for her sake  
Sordello's story? Nay, that Paduan girl  
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl  
In the dead black Giudecca proves sea-weed  
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed  
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post  
For gondolas.

You sad dishevelled ghost  
That pluck at me and point, are you advised

I breathe? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised  
—Jewels i' the locks that love no crownet like  
Their native field-buds and the green wheat-spike,  
So fair!—who left this end of June's turmoil,  
Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,  
Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free  
In dream, came join the peasants o'er the sea.)  
Look they too happy, too tricked out? Confess  
There is such niggard stock of happiness  
To share, that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,  
One labours ineffectually to stretch  
It o'er you so that mother and children, both  
May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth !  
Divide the robe yet farther: be content  
With seeing just a score pre-eminent  
Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,  
Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights !  
For, these in evidence, you clearlier claim  
A like garb for the rest,—grace all, the same  
As these my peasants. I ask youth and strength  
And health for each of you, not more—at length  
Grown wise, who asked at home that the whole race  
Might add the spirit's to the body's grace,  
And all be dizened out as chiefs and bards.  
But in this magic weather one discards  
Much old requirement. Venice seems a type

Of Life—'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,  
As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought :  
'T is Venice, and 't is Life—as good you sought  
To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone  
Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,  
As hinder Life the evil with the good  
Which make up Living, rightly understood.  
Only, do finish something ! Peasants, queens,  
Take them, made happy by whatever means,  
Parade them for the common credit, vouch  
That a luckless residue, we send to crouch  
In corners out of sight, was just as framed  
For happiness, its portion might have claimed  
As well, and so, obtaining joy, had stalked  
Fastuous as any !—such my project, baulked  
Already ; I hardly venture to adjust  
The first rags, when you find me. To mistrust  
Me !—nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,  
Have the true knack of tiring suitors out  
With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes  
Inveterately tear-shot : there, be wise,  
Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant  
You insult !—shall your friend (not slave) be shent  
For speaking home? Beside, care-bit erased  
Broken-up beauties ever took my taste  
Supremely ; and I love you more, far more

Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor.  
Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where  
A whisper came, "Let others seek!—thy care  
"Is found, thy life's provision; if thy race  
"Should be thy mistress, and into one face  
"The many faces crowd?" Ah, had I, judge,  
Or no, your secret? Rough apparel—grudge  
All ornaments save tag or tassel worn  
To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn—  
Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go  
Alone (that's saddest, but it must be so)  
Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,  
Aught desultory or undignified,—  
Then, ravishingest lady, will you pass  
Or not each formidable group, the mass  
Before the Basilic (that feast gone by,  
God's great day of the Corpus Domini)  
And, wistfully foregoing proper men,  
Come timid up to me for alms? And then  
The luxury to hesitate, feign do  
Some unexampled grace!—when, whom but you  
Dare I bestow your own upon? And hear  
Further before you say, it is to sneer  
I call you ravishing; for I regret  
Little that she, whose early foot was set  
Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,

Now, if the silent city, seems to fall  
Toward me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest  
To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed  
Dry of their tears upon my bosom. Strange  
Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,  
My love! Warped souls and bodies! yet God spoke  
Of right-hand, foot and eye—selects our yoke,  
Sordello, as your poetship may find!  
So, sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind  
Their foolish talk; we'll manage reinstate  
Your old worth; ask moreover, when they prate  
Of evil men past hope, "Don't each contrive,  
"Despite the evil you abuse, to live?—  
"Keeping, each losel, through a maze of lies,  
"His own conceit of truth? to which he hies  
"By obscure windings, tortuous, if you will,  
"But to himself not inaccessible;  
"He sees truth, and his lies are for the crowd  
"Who cannot see; some fancied right allowed  
"His vilest wrong, empowered the losel clutch  
"One pleasure from a multitude of such  
"Denied him." Then assert, "All men appear  
"To think all better than themselves, by here  
"Trusting a crowd they wrong; but really," say,  
"All men think all men stupider than they,  
"Since, save themselves, no other comprehends

“ The complicated scheme to make amends  
“ —Evil, the scheme by which, thro’ Ignorance,  
“ Good labours to exist.” A slight advance,—  
Merely to find the sickness you die through,  
And nought beside ! but if one can’t eschew  
One’s portion in the common lot, at least  
One can avoid an ignorance increased  
Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint  
How nought were like dispensing without stint  
The water of life—so easy to dispense  
Beside, when one has probed the centre whence  
Commotion’s born—could tell you of it all !  
“ —Meantime, just meditate my madrigal  
“ O’ the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe !”  
What, dullard ? we and you in smothery chafe,  
Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin  
The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,  
A hungry sun above us, sands that bung  
Our throats,—each dromedary lolls a tongue,  
Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,  
And you, ’twixt tales of Potiphar’s mishap,  
And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,  
—Remark, you wonder any one needs choke  
With founts about ! Potsherd him, Gibeonites !  
While awkwardly enough your Moses smites  
The rock, though he forego his Promised Land

Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass, and  
Figure as Metaphysic Poet . . . ah,  
Mark ye the dim first oozings? Meribah!  
Then, quaffing at the fount my courage gained,  
Recall—not that I prompt ye—who explained . . .

“Presumptuous!” interrupts one. You, not I  
'T is brother, marvel at and magnify  
Such office: “office,” quotha? can we get  
To the beginning of the office yet?  
What do we here? simply experiment  
Each on the other's power and its intent  
When elsewhere tasked,—if this of mine were trucked  
For yours to either's good,—we watch construct,  
In short, an engine: with a finished one,  
What it can do, is all,—nought, how 't is done.  
But this of ours yet in probation, dusk  
A kernel of strange wheelwork through its husk  
Grows into shape by quarters and by halves;  
Remark this tooth's spring, wonder what that valve's  
Fall bodes, presume each faculty's device,  
Make out each other more or less precise—  
The scope of the whole engine 's to be proved;  
We die: which means to say, the whole 's removed,  
Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin,—  
To be set up anew elsewhere, begin  
A task indeed, but with a clearer clime

Than the murk lodgment of our building-time.  
And then, I grant you, it behoves forget  
How 't is done—all that must amuse us yet  
So long : and, while you turn upon your heel,  
Pray that I be not busy slitting steel  
Or shredding brass, camped on some virgin shore  
Under a cluster of fresh stars, before  
I name a tithe o' the wheels I trust to do !

So occupied, then, are we : hitherto,  
At present, and a weary while to come,  
The office of ourselves,—nor blind nor dumb,  
And seeing somewhat of man's state,—has been,  
For the worst of us, to say they so have seen ;  
For the better, what it was they saw ; the best  
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest :  
“ So that I glance,” says such an one, “ around,  
“ And there 's no face but I can read profound  
“ Disclosures in ; this stands for hope, that—fear,  
“ And for a speech, a deed in proof, look here !  
“ ‘ Stoop, else the strings of blossom, where the nuts  
“ ‘ O'erarch, will blind thee ! Said I not ? She shuts  
“ ‘ Both eyes this time, so close the hazels meet !  
“ ‘ Thus, prisoned in the Piombi, I repeat  
“ ‘ Events one rove occasioned, o'er and o'er,  
“ ‘ Putting 'twixt me and madness evermore  
“ ‘ Thy sweet shape, Zanze ! Therefore stoop ! ”

" ' That's truth ! '

" (Adjudge you) ' the incarcerated youth  
" ' Would say that !'  
" Youth? Plara the bard? Set down  
" That Plara spent his youth in a grim town  
" Whose cramped ill-featured streets huddled about  
" The minster for protection, never out  
" Of its black belfry's shade and its bells' roar.  
" The brighter shone the suburb,—all the more  
" Ugly and absolute that shade's reproof  
" Of any chance escape of joy,—some roof,  
" Taller than they, allowed the rest detect,—  
" Before the sole permitted laugh (suspect  
" Who could, 't was meant for laughter, that ploughed  
    cheek's  
" Repulsive gleam !) when the sun stopped both peaks  
" Of the cleit belfry like a fiery wedge,  
" Then sank, a huge flame on its socket edge,  
" With leavings on the grey glass oriel-pane  
" Ghastly some minutes more. No fear of rain—  
" The minster minded that ! in heaps the dust  
" Lay everywhere. This town, the minster's trust,  
" Held Plara; who, its denizen, bade hail  
" In twice twelve sonnets, Tempe's dewy vale."  
" ' Exact the town, the minster and the street !'"  
" As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat:

"Lust triumphs and is gay, Love 's triumphed o'er  
 "And sad : but Lucio 's sad. I said before,  
 "Love 's sad, not Lucio ; one who loves may be  
 "As gay his love has leave to hope, as he  
 "Downcast that lusts' desire escapes the springe :  
 "'T is of the mood itself I speak, what tinge  
 "Determines it, else colourless,—or mirth,  
 "Or melancholy, as from heaven or earth."  
 "'Ay, that 's the variation's gist !'  
 "Indeed ?

"Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed !  
 "And having seen too what I saw, be bold  
 "And next encounter what I do behold  
 "(That 's sure) but bid you take on trust !"

## Attack

The use and purpose of such sights ! Alack,  
 Not so unwisely does the crowd dispense  
 On Salinguerras praise in preference  
 To the Sordellos : men of action, these !  
 Who, seeing just as little as you please,  
 Yet turn that little to account,—engage  
 With, do not gaze at,—carry on, a stage,  
 The work o' the world, not merely make report  
 The work existed ere their day ! In short,  
 When at some future no-time a brave band  
 Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand

In heaven, my brother ! Meanwhile where's the hurt  
Of keeping the Makers-see on the alert,  
At whose defection mortals stare aghast  
As though heaven's bounteous windows were slammed  
    fast

Incontinent? Whereas all you, beneath,  
Should scowl at, bruise their lips and break their teeth  
Who ply the pullies, for neglecting you :  
And therefore have I moulded, made anew  
A Man, and give him to be turned and tried,  
Be angry with or pleased at. On your side,  
Have ye times, places, actors of your own?  
Try them upon Sordello when full-grown,  
And then—ah then ! If Hercules first parched  
His foot in Egypt only to be marched  
A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,  
What chance have I ? The demigod was mute  
Till, at the altar, where time out of mind  
Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined  
His forehead long enough, and he began  
Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man.  
Take not affront, my gentle audience ! whom  
No Hercules shall make his hecatomb,  
Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend—  
That 's your kind suffrage, yours, my patron-friend,  
Whose great verse blares unintermittent on

Like your own trumpeter at Marathon,—  
You who, Platæa and Salamis being scant,  
Put up with Ætna for a stimulant—  
And did well, I acknowledged, as he loomed  
Over the midland sea last month, presumed  
Long, lay demolished in the blazing West  
At eve, while towards him tilting cloudlets pressed  
Like Persian ships at Salamis. Friend, wear  
A crest proud as desert while I declare  
Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring  
Tears of its colour from that painted king  
Who lost it, I would, for that smile which went  
To my heart, fling it in the sea, content,  
Wearing your verse in place, an amulet  
Sovereign against all passion, wear and fret !  
My English Eyebright, if you are not glad  
That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad  
Dishevelled form, wherein I put mankind  
To come at times and keep my pact in mind,  
Renewed me,—hear no crickets in the hedge,  
Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge  
At home, and may the summer showers gush  
Without a warning from the missel thrush !  
So, to our business, now—the fate of such  
As find our common nature—overmuch  
Despised because restricted and unfit

To bear the burthen they impose on it—  
Cling when they would discard it ; craving strength  
To leap from the allotted world, at length  
They do leap,—flounder on without a term,  
Each a god's germ, doomed to remain a germ  
In unexpanded infancy, unless . . .  
But that 's the story—dull enough, confess !  
There might be fitter subjects to allure ;  
Still, neither misconceive my portraiture  
Nor undervalue its adornments quaint :  
What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.  
Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,  
Then say if you condemn me or acquit.

John the Beloved, banished Antioch  
For Patmos, bade collectively his flock  
Farewell, but set apart the closing eve  
To comfort those his exile most would grieve,  
He knew : a touching spectacle, that house  
In motion to receive him ! Xanthus' spouse  
You missed, made panther's meat a month since ; but  
Xanthus himself (his nephew 't was, they shut  
'Twixt boards and sawed asunder) Polycarp,  
Soft Charicle, next year no wheel could warp  
To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest  
Were ranged ; thro' whom the grey disciple pressed,  
Busily blessing right and left, just stopped

To pat one infant's curls, the hangman cropped  
Soon after, reached the portal. On its hinge  
The door turns and he enters : what quick twinge  
Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix  
Whereon, why like some spectral candlestick's  
Branch the disciple's arms? Dead swooned he, woke  
Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heart-broke,  
"Get thee behind me, Satan! Have I toiled  
"To no more purpose? Is the gospel foiled  
"Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,  
"Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—  
"Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled  
"To see the—the—the Devil domiciled?"  
Whereto sobbed Xanthus, "Father, 't is yourself  
"Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf  
"Went to procure against to-morrow's loss;  
"And that 's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross,  
"You 're painted with!"

His puckered brows unfold—  
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

## BOOK THE FOURTH.

MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;  
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace  
Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms  
A brawny mischief to the fragile charms  
They tugged for—one discovering that to twist  
Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist  
Secured a point of vantage—one, how best  
He 'd parry that by planting in her breast  
His elbow spike—each party too intent  
For noticing, howe'er the battle went,  
The conqueror would but have a corpse to kiss.  
“ May Boniface be duly damned for this ! ”  
—Howled some old Ghibellin, as up he turned,  
From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned  
His house, a little skull with dazzling teeth :  
“ A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe  
“ In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself  
“ Be there to laugh at him ! ”—moaned some young  
Guelf

“ Tito !” Our delegates exchanged a glance,  
And, keeping the main way, admired askance  
The lazy engines of outlandish birth,  
Couched like a king each on its bank of earth—  
Arbalist, manganel and catapult ;  
While stationed by, as waiting a result,  
Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased  
Working to watch the strangers. “ This, at least,  
“ Were better spared ; he scarce presumes gainsay  
“ The League’s decision ! Get our friend away  
“ And profit for the future : how else teach  
“ Fools ’t is not safe to stray within claw’s reach  
“ Ere Salinguerra’s final gasp be blown ?  
“ Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone.  
“ Who bade him bloody the spent osprey’s nare ? ”  
    The carrochs halted in the public square.  
Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,  
Men prattled, freelier than the crested gaunt  
White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak  
Was missing, and whoever chose might speak  
“ Ecelin ” boldly out : so,—“ Ecelin  
“ Needed his wife to swallow half the sin  
“ And sickens by himself : the devil’s whelp,  
“ He styles his son, dwindles away, no help  
“ From conserves, your fine triple-curded froth  
“ Of virgin’s blood, your Venice viper-broth—

“Eh? Jubilate!”—“Peace! no little word  
“You utter here that’s not distinctly heard  
“Up at Oliero: he was absent sick  
“When we besieged Bassano—who, i’ the thick  
“O’ the work, perceived the progress Azzo made,  
“Like Ecelin, through his witch Adelarde?  
“She managed it so well that, night by night  
“At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite,  
“First fresh, pale by-and-by without a wound,  
“And, when it came with eyes filmed as in swoond,  
“They knew the place was taken.”—“Ominous  
“That Ghibellins should get what cautious  
“Old Redbeard sought from Azzo’s sire to wrench  
“Vainly; Saint George contrived his town a trench  
“O’ the marshes, an impermeable bar.”  
“—Young Ecelin is meant the tutelar  
“Of Padua, rather; veins embrace upon  
“His hand like Brenta and Bacchiglion.”  
What now?—“The founts! God’s bread, touch not a  
plank!  
“A crawling hell of carrion—every tank  
“Choke-full!—found out just now to Cino’s cost—  
“The same who gave Taurello up for lost,  
“And, making no account of fortune’s freaks,  
“Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks  
“Back now with Concorezzi: ‘faith! they drag

"Their carroch to San Vitale, plant the flag  
 "On his own palace, so adroitly razed  
 "He knew it not; a sort of Guelf folk gazed  
 "And laughed apart; Cino disliked their air—  
 "Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care—  
 "Seats himself on the tank's edge—will begin  
 "To hum, *za, za,*\* *Cavaler Ecelin*—  
 "A silence; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,  
 "Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,  
 "At last, *za, za* and up with a fierce kick  
 "Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick  
 "Grey hair about his spur!"

Which means, they lift

The covering, Salinguerra made a shift  
 To stretch upon the truth; as well avoid  
 Further disclosures; leave them thus employed.  
 Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,  
 And poor Ferrara puts a softened face  
 On her misfortunes. Let us scale this tall  
 Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall  
 Bastioned within by trees of every sort  
 On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short;  
 Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,  
 The fig-tree reared itself,—but stark and cramped,  
 Made fools of, like tamed lions: whence, on the edge,  
 Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge

Of shade, were shrubs inserted, warp and woof,  
Which smothered up that variance. Scale the roof  
Of solid tops, and o'er the slope you slide  
Down to a grassy space level and wide,  
Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees  
Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,  
Set by itself: and in the centre spreads,  
Borne upon three uneasy leopards' heads,  
A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirit  
Of water bubbles in. The walls begirt  
With trees leave off on either hand; pursue  
Your path along a wondrous avenue  
Those walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,  
With aloes leering everywhere, grey-grown  
From many a Moorish summer: how they wind  
Out of the fissures! likelier to bind  
The building than those rusted cramps which drop  
Already in the eating sunshine. Stop,  
You fleeting shapes above there! Ah, the pride  
Or else despair of the whole country-side!  
A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,  
God, goddess, woman, man, the Greek rough-rasps  
In crumbling Naples marble—meant to look  
Like those Messina marbles Constance took  
Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed  
To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,—

A certain font with caryatides  
Since cloistered at Goito ; only, these  
Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop  
Able to right themselves—who see you, stoop  
Their arms o' the instant after you ! Unplucked  
By this or that, you pass ; for they conduct  
To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,  
Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien  
Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle  
No doubt. Here, left a sullen breathing-while,  
Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood  
For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood  
Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath  
Those shading fingers in their iron sheath,  
Steadied his strengths amid the buzz and stir  
Of the dusk hideous amphitheatre  
At the announcement of his over-match  
To wind the day's diversion up, dispatch  
The pertinacious Gaul : while, limbs one heap,  
The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap  
Dart after dart forth, as her hero's car  
Clove dizzily the solid of the war  
—Let coil about his knees for pride in him.  
We reach the farthest terrace, and the grim  
San Pietro Palace stöps us.

Such the state

Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate  
Sicilian marvels, that his girlish wife  
Retrude still might lead her ancient life  
In her new home : whereat enlarged so much  
Neighbours upon the novel princely touch  
He took,—who here imprisons Boniface.  
Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace ;  
And here, emerging from the labyrinth  
Below, Sordello paused beside the plinth  
Of the door-pillar.

He had really left  
Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft  
From the morass) where Este's camp was made ;  
The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade—  
All had been seen by him, but scarce as when,—  
Eager for cause to stand aloof from men  
At every point save the fantastic tie  
Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,—  
He made account of such. A crowd,—he meant  
To task the whole of it ; each part's intent  
Concerned him therefore : and, the more he pried,  
The less became Sordello satisfied  
With his own figure at the moment. Sought  
He respite from his task ? Descried he aught  
Novel in the anticipated sight  
Of all these livers upon all delight ?

This phalanx, as of myriad points combined,  
Whereby he still had imaged the mankind  
His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,  
His age—in plans to prove at least such thing  
Had been so dreamed,—which now he must impress  
With his own will, effect a happiness  
By theirs,—supply a body to his soul  
Thence, and become eventually whole  
With them as he had hoped to be without—  
Made these the mankind he once raved about?  
Because a few of them were notable,  
Should all be figured worthy note? As well  
Expect to find Taurello's triple line  
Of trees a single and prodigious pine.  
Real pines rose here and there; but, close among,  
Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng  
Of shrubs, he saw,—a nameless common sort  
O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report  
And hurried into corners, or at best  
Admitted to be fancied like the rest.  
Reckon that morning's proper chiefs—how few!  
And yet the people grew, the people grew,  
Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,  
More left behind and most who should succeed,—  
Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,  
Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,—

Mingled with, and made veritably great  
Those chiefs : he overlooked not Mainard's state  
Nor Concorezzi's station, but instead  
Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head  
Of infinite and absent Tyrolese  
Or Paduans ; startling all the more, that these  
Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,  
Yet doubtless on the whole (like Eglamor)  
Smiling ; for if a wealthy man decays  
And out of store of robes must wear, all days,  
One tattered suit, alike in sun and shade,  
'T is commonly some tarnished gay brocade  
Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more :  
Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store  
Of looks is fain upgather, keep unfurled  
For common wear as she goes through the world,  
The faint remainder of some worn-out smile  
Meant for a feast-night's service merely. While  
 Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus,—  
(Crowds no way interfering to discuss,  
Much less dispute, life's joys with one employed  
In envying them,—or, if they aught enjoyed,  
Where lingered something indefinable  
In every look and tone, the mirth as well  
As woe, that fixed at once his estimate  
Of the result, their good or bad estate)—

Old memories returned with new effect:  
And the new body, ere he could suspect,  
Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,  
The new self seemed impatient to be used  
By him, but utterly another way  
Than that anticipated: strange to say,  
They were too much below him, more in thrall  
Than he, the adjunct than the principal.  
What booted scattered units?—here a mind  
And there, which might repay his own to find,  
And stamp, and use?—a few, howe'er august,  
If all the rest were grovelling in the dust?  
No: first a mighty equilibrium, sure,  
Should he establish, privilege procure  
For all, the few had long possessed! He felt  
An error, an exceeding error melt:  
While he was occupied with Mantuan chants,  
Behoved him think of men, and take their wants,  
Such as he now distinguished every side,  
As his own want which might be satisfied,—  
And, after that, think of rare qualities  
Of his' own soul demanding exercise.  
It followed naturally, through no claim  
On their part, which made virtue of the aim  
At serving them, on his,—that, past retrieve,  
He felt now in their toils, theirs—nor could leave

Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule,  
Impress his will on mankind, he (the fool !)  
Had never even entertained the thought  
That this his last arrangement might be fraught  
With incidental good to them as well,  
And that mankind's delight would help to swell  
His own. So, if he sighed, as formerly  
Because the merry time of life must fleet,  
'T was deeper now,—for could the crowds repeat  
Their poor experiences? His hand that shook  
Was twice to be deplored. "The Legate, look!  
"With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,  
"Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,  
"Large tongue, moist open mouth; and this long while  
"That owner of the idiotic smile  
"Serves them!"

He fortunately saw in time  
His fault however, and since the office prime  
Includes the secondary—best accept  
Both offices; Taurello, its adept,  
Could teach him the preparatory one,  
And how to do what he had fancied done  
Long previously, ere take the greater task.  
How render first these people happy? Ask  
The people's friends: for there must be one good  
One way to it—the Cause! He understood

The meaning now of Palma ; why the jar  
Else, the ado, the trouble wide and far  
Of Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard hope  
And Rome's despair?—twixt Emperor and Pope  
The confused shifting sort of Eden tale—  
Hardihood still recurring, still to fail—  
That foreign interloping fiend, this free  
And native overbrooding deity :  
Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms  
The Kaiser ruined, troubling even the calms  
Of paradise ; or, on the other hand,  
The Pontiff, as the Kaisers understand,  
One snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,  
Whose heavy length breaks in the noon profound  
Some saving tree—which needs the Kaiser, dressed  
As the dislodging angel of thàt pest :  
Yet flames that pest bedropped, flat head, full fold,  
With coruscating dower of dyes. “Behold  
“The secret, so to speak, and master-spring  
“O' the contest !—which of the two Powers shall bring  
“Men good, perchance the most good : ay, it may  
“Be that !—the question, which best knows the way.”  
And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past  
Out of San Pietro ; never seemed the last  
Of archers, slingers : and our friend began  
To recollect strange modes of serving man—

Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,  
And more. "This way of theirs may,—who can tell?—  
"Need perfecting," said he: "let all be solved  
"At once! Taurello 't is, the task devolved  
"On late: confront Taurello!"

And at last

He did confront him. Scarce an hour had past  
When forth Sordello came, older by years  
Than at his entry. Unexampled fears  
Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute  
And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,  
Into Ferrara—not the empty town  
That morning witnessed: he went up and down  
Streets whence the veil had been stript shred by shred,  
So that, in place of huddling with their dead  
Indoors, to answer Salinuerra's ends,  
Townsfolk make shift to crawl forth, sit like friends  
With any one. A woman gave him choice  
Of her two daughters, the infantile voice  
Or the dimpled knee, for half a chain, his throat—  
Was clasped with; but an archer knew the coat—  
Its blue cross and eight lilies,—bade beware  
One dogging him in concert with the pair  
Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.  
Night set in early, autumn dews were rife,  
They kindled great fires while the Leaguers' mass

Began at every carroch : he must pass  
Between the kneeling people. Presently  
The carroch of Verona caught his eye  
With purple trappings ; silently he bent  
Over its fire, when voices violent  
Began, "Affirm not whom the youth was like  
"That struck me from the porch : I did not strike  
"Again : I too have chestnut hair : my kin  
"Hate Azzo and stand up for Ecein.  
"Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away ! Sing ! Take  
"My glove for guerdon !" And for that man's sake  
He turned : "A song of Eglamor's!"—scarce named,  
When, "Our Sordello's rather!"—all exclaimed ;  
"Is not Sordello famousst for rhyme?"  
He had been happy to deny, this time,—  
Profess as heretofore the aching head  
And failing heart,—suspect that in his stead  
Some true Apollo had the charge of them,  
Was champion to reward or to condemn,  
So his intolerable risk might shift  
Or share itself ; but Naddo's precious gift  
Of gifts, he owned, be certain ! At the close—  
"I made that," said he to a youth who rose  
As if to hear : 't was Palma through the band  
Conducted him in silence by her hand.  
Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent

Gave place to Palma and her friend, who went  
In turn at Montelungo's visit : one  
After the other were they come and gone,—  
These spokesmen for the Kaiser and the Pope,  
This incarnation of the People's hope,  
Sordello,—all the say of each was said ;  
And Salinguerra sat,—himself instead  
Of these to talk with, lingered musing yet.  
'T was a drear vast presence-chamber roughly set  
In order for the morning's use ; full face,  
The Kaiser's ominous sign-mark had first place,  
The crowned grim twy-necked eagle, coarsely-blacked  
With ochre on the naked wall ; nor lacked  
Romano's green and yellow either side ;  
But the new token Tito brought had tried  
The Legate's patience—nay, if Palma knew  
What Salinguerra almost meant to do  
Until the sight of her restored his lip  
A certain half-smile, three months' chieftainship  
Had banished ! Afterward, the Legate found  
No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound  
And unwound carelessly. Now sat the Chief  
Silent as when our couple left, whose brief  
Encounter wrought so opportune effect  
In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject,  
Though time 't was now if ever, to pause—fix

On any sort of ending: wiles and tricks  
Exhausted, judge ! his charge, the crazy town,  
Just managed to be hindered crashing down—  
His last sound troops ranged—care observed to post  
His best of the maimed soldiers innermost—  
So much was plain enough, but somehow struck  
Him not before.\* And now with this strange luck  
Of Tito's news, rewarding his address  
So well, what thought he of?—how the success  
With Friedrich's rescript there, would either hush  
Old Ecelin's scruples, bring the manly flush  
To his young son's white cheek, or, last, exempt  
Himself from telling what there was to tempt?  
No : that this minstrel was Romano's last  
Servant—himself the first ! Could he contrast  
The whole!—that minstrel's thirty years just spent  
In doing nought, their noblest event  
This morning's journey hither, as I told—  
Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,  
A stammering awkward man that scarce dared raise  
His eye before the magisterial gaze—  
And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes  
Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,  
Cares and contrivances, yet, you would say,  
'T was a youth nonchalantly looked away  
Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick

Expostulating trees—so agile, quick  
And graceful turned the head on the broad chest  
Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,  
Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire  
Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire  
Of steel, that head let breathe the comely brown  
Large massive locks discoloured as if a crown  
Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where  
A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;  
Glossy above, glossy below, it swept  
Curling and fine about a brow thus kept  
Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound :  
This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,  
Mused of, turned over books about. Square-faced,  
No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased  
In hollows filled with many a shade and streak  
Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek.  
Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed  
A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed,  
Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent  
Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent,  
Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train  
As now a period was fulfilled again :  
Of such, a series made his life, compressed  
In each, one story serving for the rest—  
How his life-streams rolling arrived at last

At the barrier, whence, were it once  
They would emerge, a river to the end,—  
(gathered themselves up, paused, bade fate  
Took the leap, hung a minute at the height,  
Then fell back to oblivion infinite :  
Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched  
Where late the adversary, breaking bounds,  
Had gained him an occasion, That above,  
That eagle, testified he could improve  
Effectually. The Kaiser's symbol lay  
Beside his rescript, a new badge by way  
Of baldric; while,—another thing that  
Alike emprise, achievement and reward,—  
Ecclin's missive was conspicuous too.

What past life did those flying thoughts  
As his, few names in Mantua half so old ;  
But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled  
It latterly, the Adelardi spared  
No pains to rival them : both factions  
Ferrara, so that, counted out, 't would yield  
A product very like the city's shield,  
Half black and white, or Ghibellin and  
As after Salinguerra styled himself  
And Este who, till Marchesalla died,  
(Last of the Adelardi)—never tried  
His fortune there : with Marchesalla's child

Would pass,—could Blacks and Whites be reconciled  
And young Taurello wed Linguetta,—wealth  
And sway to a sole grasp. Each treats by stealth  
Already: when the Guelfs, the Ravennese  
Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize  
Linguetta, and are gone! Men's first dismay  
Abated somewhat, hurries down, to lay  
The after indignation, Boniface,  
This Richard's father. "Learn the full disgrace  
"Averted, ere you blame us Guelfs, who rate  
"Your Salinguerra, your sole potentate  
"That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors—  
"Ay, Azzo's—who, not privy to, abhors  
"Our step; but we were zealous." Azzo then  
To do with! Straight a meeting of old men:  
"Old Salinguerra dead, his heir a boy,  
"What if we change our ruler and decoy  
"The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere  
"With Italy to build in, fix him here,  
"Settle the city's troubles in a trice?  
"For private wrong, let public good suffice!"  
In fine, young Salinguerra's staunchest friends  
Talked of the townsmen making him amends,  
Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was  
Rare sport, one morning, over the green grass  
A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,

Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again  
In time for Azzo's entry with the bride ;  
Count Boniface rode smirking at their side ;  
" She brings him half Ferrara," whispers flew,  
" And all Ancona ! If the stripling knew ! "

Anon the stripling was in Sicily  
Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance ; he  
Was gracious nor his guest incapable ;  
Each understood the other. So it fell,  
One Spring, when Azzo, thoroughly at ease,  
Had near forgotten by what precise degrees  
He crept at first to such a downy seat,  
The Count trudged over in a special heat  
To bid him of God's love dislodge from each  
Of Salinguerra's palaces,—a breach  
Might yawn else, not so readily to shut,  
For who was just arrived at Mantua but  
The youngster, sword on thigh and tuft on chin,  
With tokens for Celano, Ecelin,  
Pistore, and the like ! Next news,—no whit  
Do any of Ferrara's domes befit  
His wife of Heinrich's very blood : a band .  
Of foreigners assemble, understand  
Garden-constructing, level and surround,  
Build up and bury in. A last news crowned  
The consternation : since his infant's birth,

He only waits they end his wondrous girth  
Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà,  
To visit Mantua. When the Podestà  
Ecelin, at Vicenza, called his friend  
Taurello thither, what could be their end  
But to restore the Ghibellins' late Head,  
The Kaiser helping? He with most to dread  
From vengeance and reprisal, Azzo, there  
With Boniface beforehand, as aware  
Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled  
Both plotters: but the Guelfs in triumph yelled  
Too hastily. The burning and the flight,  
And how Taurello, occupied that night  
With Ecelin, lost wife and son, I told:  
—Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,  
Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst  
O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first:  
But afterward men heard not constantly  
Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be!  
Though Azzo simply gained by the event  
A shifting of his plagues—the first, content  
To fall behind the second and estrange  
So far his nature, suffer such a change  
That in Romano sought he wife and child,  
And for Romano's sake seemed reconciled  
To losing individual life, which shrunk

As the other prospered—mortised in his trunk ;  
Like a dwarf palm which wanton Arabs foil  
Of bearing its own proper wine and oil,  
By grafting into it the stranger-vine,  
Which sucks its heart out, sly and serpentine,  
Till forth one vine-palm feathers to the root,  
And red drops moisten the insipid fruit.  
Once Adelaide set on,—the subtle mate  
Of the weak soldier, urged to emulate  
The Church's valiant women deed for deed,  
And paragon her namesake, win the meed  
O' the great Matilda,—soon they overbore  
The rest of Lombardy,—not as before  
By an instinctive truculence, but patched  
The Kaiser's strategy until it matched  
The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means.  
“ Only, why is it Salinguerra screens  
“ Himself behind Romano?—him we bade  
“ Enjoy our shine i' the front, not seek the shade !”  
—Asked Heinrich, somewhat of the tardiest  
To comprehend. Nor Philip acquiesced  
At once in the arrangement; reasoned, plied  
His friend with offers of another bride,  
A statelier function—fruitlessly: 't was plain  
Taurello through some weakness must remain  
Obscure. And Otho, free to judge of both

—Ecelin the unready, harsh and loth,  
And this more plausible and facile wight  
With every point a-sparkle—chose the right,  
Admiring how his predecessors harped  
On the wrong man : “ thus,” quoth he, “ wits are warped  
“ By outsides ! ” Carelessly, meanwhile, his life  
Suffered its many turns of peace and strife  
In many lands—you hardly could surprise  
The man ; who shamed Sordello (recognize ! )  
In this as much beside, that, unconcerned  
What qualities were natural or earned,  
With no ideal of graces, as they came  
He took them, singularly well the same—  
Speaking the Greek’s own language, just because  
Your Greek eludes you, leave the least of flaws  
In contracts with him ; while, since Arab lore  
Holds the stars’ secret—take one trouble more  
And master it ! ’T is done, and now deter  
Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,  
From Friedrich’s path !—Friedrich, whose pilgrimage  
The same man puts aside, whom he ’ll engage  
To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,  
Come to Bassano, see Saint Francis’ church  
And judge of Guido the Bolognian’s piece  
Which,—lend Taurello credit,—rivals Greece—  
Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits

Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits.  
For elegance, he strung the angelot,  
Made rhymes thereto ; for prowess, clove he not  
Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper? Why  
Detail you thus a varied mastery  
But to show how Taurello, on the watch  
For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch  
Their capabilities and purposes,  
Displayed himself so far as displayed these :  
While our Sordello only cared to know  
About men as a means whereby he 'd show  
Himself, and men had much or little worth  
According as they kept in or drew forth  
That self ; the other's choicest instruments  
Surmised him shallow.

Meantime, malcontents

Dropped off, town after town grew wiser. "How  
"Change the world's face?" asked people ; "as 't is now  
"It has been, will be ever : very fine  
"Subjecting things profane to things divine,  
"In talk ! This contumacy will fatigue  
"The vigilance of Este and the League !  
"The Ghibellins gain on us!"—as it happened.  
Old Azzo and old Boniface, entrapped  
By Ponte Alto, both in one month's space  
Slept at Verona : either left a brace

Of sons—but, three years after, either's pair  
Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir :  
Azzo remained and Richard—all the stay  
Of Este and Saint Boniface, at bay  
As 't were. Then, either Ecelin grew old  
Or his brain altered—not o' the proper mould  
For new appliances—his old palm-stock  
Endured no influx of strange strengths. He 'd rock  
As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low  
As proud of the completeness of his woe,  
Then weep real tears ;—now make some mad onslaught  
On Este, heedless of the lesson taught  
So painfully,—now cringe for peace, sue peace  
At price of past gain, bar of fresh increase  
To the fortunes of Romano. Up at last  
Rose Este, down Romano sank as fast.  
And men remarked these freaks of peace and war  
Happened while Salinguerra was afar :  
Whence every friend besought him, all in vain,  
To use his old adherent's wits again.  
Not he !—“ who had advisers in his sons,  
“ Could plot himself, nor needed any one's  
“ Advice.” ‘T was Adelaide's remaining staunch  
Prevented his destruction root and branch  
Forthwith ; but when she died, doom fell, for gay  
He made alliances, gave lands away

To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew  
For ever from the world. Taurello, who  
Was summoned to the convent, then refused  
A word at the wicket, patience thus abused,  
Promptly threw off alike his imbecile  
Ally's yoke, and his own frank, foolish smile.  
Soon a few movements of the happier sort  
Changed matters, put himself in men's report  
As heretofore ; he had to fight, beside,  
And that became him ever. So, in pride  
And flushing of this kind of second youth,  
He dealt a good-will blow. Este in truth  
Lay prone— and men remembered, somewhat late,  
A laughing old outrageous stifled hate  
He bore to Este—how it would outbreak  
At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake  
In sunny weather—as that noted day  
When with his hundred friends he tried to slay  
Azzo before the Kaiser's face : and how,  
On Azzo's calm refusal to allow  
A liegeman's challenge, straight he too was calmed :  
As if his hate could bear to lie embalmed,  
Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, and survive  
All intermediate crumblings, to arrive  
At earth's catastrophe—'t was Este's crash  
Not Azzo's he demanded, so, no rash

Procedure ! Este's true antagonist  
Rose out of Ecelin : all voices whist,  
All eyes were sharpened, wits predicted. He  
'T was, leaned in the embrasure absently,  
Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace  
With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face  
I' the dust : but as the trees waved sere, his smile  
Deepened, and words expressed its thought erewhile.

“ Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer?  
“ That we should stick together, all the year  
“ I kept Vicenza !—How old Boniface,  
“ Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,  
“ He by that pillar, I at this,—caught each  
“ In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,  
“ Egging the rabble on to disavow  
“ Allegiance to their Marquis—Bacchus, how  
“ They boasted ! Ecelin must turn their drudge,  
“ Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge  
“ Paying arrears of tribute due long since—  
“ Bacchus ! My man could promise then, nor wince  
“ The bones-and-muscles ! Sound of wind and limb,  
“ Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him :  
“ And now he sits me, slavering and mute,  
“ Intent on chafing each starved purple foot  
“ Benumbed past aching with the altar slab:  
“ Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab

“Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps,  
“ ‘Friedrich’s affirmed to be our side the Alps’  
“—Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet?  
“Sworn to abjure the world, its fume and fret,  
“God’s own now? Drop the dormitory bar,  
“Enfold the scanty grey serge scapular  
“Twice o’er the cowl to muffle memories out!  
“So! But the midnight whisper turns a shout,  
“Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate  
“In the stone walls: the past, the world you hate  
“Is with you, ambush, open field—or see  
“The surging flame—we fire Vicenza—glee!  
“Follow, let Piho and Bernardo chafe!  
“Bring up the Mantuans—through San Biagio—safe!  
“Ah, the mad people waken? Ah, they writhe  
“And reach us? If they block the gate? No tithe  
“Can pass—keep back, you Bassanese! The edge,  
“Use the edge—shear, thrust, hew, melt down the wedge,  
“Let out the black of those black upturned eycs!  
“Hell—are they sprinkling fire too? The blood fries  
“And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear  
“Those upturned faces choking with despair.  
“Brave! Slidder through the reeking gate! ‘How now?  
“‘You six had charge of her?’ And then the vow  
“Comes, and the foam spirts, hair’s plucked, till one  
    shrick

“(I hear it) and you fling—you cannot speak—  
“Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled  
“The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled  
“This morn, naked across the fire: how crown  
“The archer that exhausted lays you down  
“Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies?  
“While one, while mine . . .

“Bacchus! I think there lies  
“More than one corpse there” (and he paced the room)  
“—Another cinder somewhere: ‘t was my doom  
“Beside, my doom! If Adelaide is dead,  
“I live the same, this Azzo lives instead  
“Of that to me, and we pull, any how,  
“Este into a heap: the matter’s now  
“At the true juncture slipping us so oft.  
“Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed  
“His crown at such a juncture! Still, if hold  
“Our Friedrich’s purpose, if this chain enfold  
“The neck of . . . who but this same Ecelin  
“That must recoil when the best days begin!  
“Recoil? that’s nought; if the recoil leaves  
“His name for me to fight with, no one grieves:  
“But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock  
“His cloister to become my stumbling-block  
“Just as of old! Ay, ay, there ‘t is again—  
“The land’s inevitable Head—explain

“The reverences that subject us! Count  
“These Ecelins now! Not to say as fount,  
“Originating power of thought,—from twelve  
“That drop i’ the trenches they joined hands to delve,  
“Six shall surpass him, but . . . why men must twine  
“Somehow with something! Ecelin’s a fine  
“Clear name! ’Twere simpler, doubtless, twine with me  
“At once: our cloistered friend’s capacity  
“Was of a sort! I had to share myself  
“In fifty portions, like an o’ertasked elf  
“That’s forced illume in fifty points the vast  
“Rare vapour he’s environed by. At last  
“My strengths, though sorely frittered, c’en converge  
“And crown . . . no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge  
“The man be crowned!

“That aloe, an he durst,  
“Would climb! Just such a bloated sprawler first  
“I noted in Messina’s castle-court  
“The day I came, when Heinrich asked in sport  
“If I would pledge my faith to win him back  
“His right in Lombardy: ‘for, once bid pack  
“‘Marauders,’ he continued, ‘in my stead  
“‘Yōu rule, Taurello!’ and upon this head  
“Laid the silk glove of Constance—I see her  
“Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,  
“Retrude following!

“ I am absolved  
“ From further toil : the empery devolved  
“ On me, ’t was Tito’s word : I have to lay  
“ For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,  
“ Prompt nobody, and render an account  
“ Taurello to Taurello ! Nay, I mount  
“ To Friedrich : he conceives the post I kept,  
“ —Who did true service, able or inept,  
“ Who ’s worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I.  
“ Me guerdoned, counsel follows : would he vie  
“ With the Pope really ? Azzo, Boniface  
“ Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen’s race  
“ Must break ere govern Lombardy. I point  
“ How easy ’t were to twist, once out of joint,  
“ The socket from the bone : my Azzo’s stare  
“ Meanwhile ! for I, this idle strap to wear,  
“ Shall—fret myself abundantly, what end  
“ To serve ? There ’s left me twenty years to spend  
“ —How better than my old way ? Had I one  
“ Who laboured overthrow my work—a son  
“ Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,  
“ To root my pines up and then poison me,  
“ Suppose—’t were worth while frustrate that ! Beside,  
“ Another life’s ordained me : the world’s tide  
“ Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press  
“ Of waves, a single wave though weariness

“ Gently lifted aside, laid upon shore?  
“ My life must be lived out in foam and roar,  
“ No question. Fifty years the province held  
“ Taurello ; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,  
“ He in the midst—who leaves this quaint stone  
    place,  
“ These trees a year or two, then not a trace  
“ Of him ! How obtain hold, fetter men’s tongues  
“ Like this poor minstrel with the foolish songs—  
“ To which, despite our bustle, he is linked?  
“ —Flowers one may tease, that never grow extinct.  
“ Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where  
“ I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,  
“ To overawe the aloes ; and we trod  
“ Those flowers, how call you such?—into the sod ;  
“ A stately foreigner—a world of pain  
“ To make it thrive, arrest rough winds—all vain !  
“ It would decline ; these would not be destroyed :  
“ And now, where is it? where can you avoid  
“ The flowers? I frighten children twenty years  
“ Longer!—which way, too, Ecelin appears  
“ To thwart me, for his son’s besotted youth  
“ Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth :  
“ They feel it at Vicenza ! Fate, fate, fate,  
“ My fine Taurello ! Go you, promulgate  
“ Friedrich’s decree, and here ’s shall aggrandise

“ Young Ecelin—your Prefect’s badge ! a prize  
 “ Too precious, certainly.

“ How now ? Compete  
 “ With my old comrade ? shuffle from their seat  
 “ His children ? Paltry dealing ! Do n’t I know  
 “ Ecelin ? now, I think, and years ago !  
 “ What ’s changed—the weakness ? did not I compound  
 “ For that, and undertake to keep him sound  
 “ Despite it ? Here ’s Taurello hankering  
 “ After a boy’s preferment—this plaything  
 “ To carry, Bacchus ! ” And he laughed.

#### Remark

Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark  
 Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort  
 Fail : while these last are ever stopping short—  
 (So much they should—so little they can do !)  
 The careless tribe see nothing to pursue  
 If they desist ; meantime their scheme succeeds.

Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds  
 Methodic with Taurello ; so, he turned,—  
 Enough amused by fancies fairly earned  
 Of Este’s horror-struck submitted neck,  
 And Richard, the cowed braggart, at his beck,—  
 To his own petty but immediate doubt  
 If he could pacify the League without  
 Conceding Richard ; just to this was brought

That interval of vain discursive thought !  
As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit  
Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot  
Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black  
Enormous watercourse which guides him back  
To his own tribe again, where he is king ;  
And laughs because he guesses, numbering  
The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch  
Of the first lizard wrested from its couch  
Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips  
To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,  
And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert-blast)  
That he has reached its boundary, at last  
May breathe ;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South  
Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth,  
Eyes, nails, and hair ; but, these enchantments tried  
In fancy, puts them soberly aside  
For truth, projects a cool return with friends,  
The likelihood of winning mere amends  
Ere long ; thinks that, takes comfort silently,  
Then, from the river's brink, his wrongs and he,  
Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon  
Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.

Midnight : the watcher nodded on his spear,  
Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear  
For any meagre and discoloured moon

To venture forth ; and such was peering soon  
Above the harassed city—her close lanes  
Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,  
As though she shrunk into herself to keep  
What little life was saved, more safely. Heap  
By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside  
The blackest spoke Sordello and replied  
Palma with none to listen. “ “T is your cause :  
“ What makes a Ghibellin? There should be laws—  
“ (Remember how my youth escaped ! I trust  
“ To you for manhood, Palma ! tell me just  
“ As any child)—there must be laws at work  
“ Explaining this. Assure me, good may lurk  
“ Under the bad,—my multitude has part  
“ In your designs, their welfare is at heart  
“ With Salinguerra, to their interest  
“ Refer the deeds he dwelt on,—so divest  
“ Our conference of much that scared me. Why  
“ Affect that heartless tone to Tito? I  
“ Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind  
“ This morn, a recreant to my race—mankind  
“ O'erlooked till now : why boast my spirit's force,  
“ —Such force denied its object? why divorce  
“ These, then admire my spirit's flight the same  
“ As though it bore up, helped some half-orbed flame  
“ Else quenched in the dead void, to living space?

“ That orb cast off to chaos and disgrace,  
“ Why vaunt so much my unencumbered dance,  
“ Making a feat’s facilities enhance  
“ Its marvel? But I front Taurello, one  
“ Of happier fate, and all I should have done,  
“ He does ; the people’s good being paramount  
“ With him, their progress may perhaps account  
“ For his abiding still; whereas you heard  
“ The talk with Tito—the excuse preferred  
“ For burning those five hostages,—and broached  
“ By way of blind, as you and I approached,  
“ I do believe.”

She spoke : then he, “ My thought  
“ Plainlier expressed ! All to your profit—nought  
“ Meantime of these, of conquests to achieve  
“ For them, of wretchedness he might relieve  
“ While profiting your party. Azzo, too,  
“ Supports a cause : what cause? Do Guelfs pursue  
“ Their ends by means like yours, or better?”

When

The Guelfs were proved alike, men weighed with men,  
And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,  
Morn broke : “ Once more, Sordello, meet its gaze  
“ Proudly—the people’s charge against thee fails  
“ In every point, while either party quails!  
“ These are the busy ones : be silent thou !

“ Two parties take the world up, and allow  
“ No third, yet have one principle, subsist  
“ By the same injustice ; whoso shall enlist  
“ With either, ranks with man’s inveterate foes.  
“ So there is one less quarrel to compose :  
“ The Guelf, the Ghibellin may be to curse—  
“ I have done nothing, but both sides do worse  
“ Than nothing. Nay, to me, forgotten, reft  
“ Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left  
“ The notion of a service—ha? What lured  
“ Me here, what mighty aim was I assured  
“ Must move Taurello? What if there remained  
“ A cause, intact, distinct from these, ordained  
“ For me, its true discoverer?”

Some one pressed  
Before them here, a watcher, to suggest  
The subject for a ballad : “ They must know  
“ The tale of the dead worthy, long ago  
“ Consul of Rome—that’s long ago for us,  
“ Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus  
“ In the world’s corner—but too late no doubt,  
“ For the brave time he sought to bring about.  
“ —Not know Crescentius Nomentanus?” Then  
He cast about for terms to tell him, when  
Sordello disavowed it, how they used  
Whenever their Superior introduced

A novice to the Brotherhood—("for I  
"Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily  
"Appointed too," quoth he, "till Innocent  
"Bade me relinquish, to my small content,  
"My wife or my brown sleeves")—some brother spoke  
Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke  
The edict issued, after his demise,  
Which blotted fame alike and effigies,  
All out except a floating power, a name  
Including, tending to produce the same  
Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least  
Within that brain, though to a vulgar priest  
And a vile stranger,—two not worth a slave  
Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho,—fortune gave  
The rule there: so, Crescentius, haply dressed  
In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,  
Taking the people at their word, forth stepped  
As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept  
Rome waiting,—stood erect, and from his brain  
Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,  
Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome, Kings styled  
Themselves mere citizens of, and, beguiled  
Into great thoughts thereby, would choose the gem  
Out of a lapfull, spoil their diadem  
—The Senate's cypher was so hard to scratch  
He flashes like a phanal, all men catch

The flame, Rome's just accomplished ! when returned  
Otho, with John, the Consul's step had spurned,  
And Hugo Lord of Este, to redress  
The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress  
Of adverse fortune bent. "They crucified  
"Their Consul in the Forum ; and abide  
"E'er since such slaves at Rome, that I—(for I  
"Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily  
"Appointed)—I had option to keep wife  
"Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife  
"Lose both. A song of Rome!"

And Rome, indeed,

Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,  
The Mother-City of his Mantuan days,  
Looked an established point of light whence rays  
Traversed the world ; for, all the clustered homes  
Beside of men, seemed bent on being Romes  
In their degree ; the question was, how each  
Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach.  
Nor, of the Two, did either principle  
Struggle to change, but to possess Rome,—still  
Guelf Rome or Ghibellin Rome.

Let Rome advance !

Rome, as she struck Sordello's ignorance—  
How could he doubt one moment? Rome's the Cause !  
Rome of the Pandects, all the world's new laws—

Of the Capitol, of Castle Angelo ;  
New structures, that inordinately glow,  
Subdued, brought back to harmony, made ripe  
By many a relic of the archetype  
Extant for wonder ; every upstart church  
That hoped to leave old temples in the lurch,  
Corrected by the Theatre forlorn  
That,—as a mundane shell, its world late born,—  
Lay and o'ershadowed it. These hints combined,  
Rome typifies the scheme to put mankind  
Once more in full possession of their rights.  
“ Let us have Rome again ! On me it lights  
“ To build up Rome—on me, the first and last :  
“ For such a future was endured the past ! ”  
And thus, in the grey twilight, forth he sprung  
To give his thought consistency among  
The very People—let their facts avail  
Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

## BOOK THE FIFTH.

Is it the same Sordello in the dusk  
As at the dawn?—merely a perished husk  
Now, that arose a power fit to build  
Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled  
So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine  
—A Rome indebted to no Palatine—  
Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possessed  
Of thy wish now, rewarded for thy quest  
To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons?  
Are this and this and this the shining ones  
Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say,  
Your favoured tenantry pursue their way  
After a fashion! This companion slips  
On the smooth causey, t' other blinkard trips  
At his mooned sandal. “Leave to lead the brawls  
“Here i' the atria?” No, friend! He that sprawls  
On aught but a stibadium . . . what his dues  
Who puts the lustral vase to such an use?

Oh, huddle up the day's disasters ! March,  
Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch,  
Rome !

Yet before they quite disband—a whim—  
Study mere shelter, now, for him, and him,  
Nay, even the worst,—just house them ! Any cave  
Suffices : throw out earth ! A loophole ? Brave !  
They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass  
Grow, hear the larks sing ? Dead art thou, alas,  
And I am dead ! But here's our son excels  
At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells  
Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes  
His dream into a door-post, just escapes  
The mystery of hinges. Lie we both  
Perdue another age. The goodly growth  
Of brick and stone ! Our building-pelt was rough,  
But that descendant's garb suits well enough  
A portico-contriver. Speed the years—  
What's time to us ? At last, a city rears  
Itself ! nay, enter—what's the grave to us ?  
Lo, our forlorn acquaintance carry thus  
The head ! Successively sewer, forum, cirque—  
Last age, an aqueduct was counted work,  
But now they tire the artificer upon  
Blank alabaster, black obsidion,  
—Careful, Jove's face be duly fulgurant,

And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant  
Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed  
Above the baths. What difference betwixt  
This Rome and ours—resemblance what, between  
That scurvy dumb-show and this pageant sheen—  
These Romans and our rabble? Use thy wit!  
The work marched: step by step,—a workman fit  
Took each, nor too fit,—to one task, one time,—  
No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,  
When just the substituting osier lithe  
For brittle bulrush, sound wood for soft withe,  
To further loam-and-roughcast-work a stage,—  
Exacts an architect, exacts an age:  
No tables of the Mauritanian tree  
For men whose maple log's their luxury!  
That way was Rome built. "Better" (say you) "merge  
"At once all workmen in the demiurge,  
"All epochs in a lifetime, every task  
"In one!" So should the sudden city bask  
I' the day—while those we'd feast there, want the knack  
Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,  
Distinguish not rare peacock from vile swan,  
Nor Mareotic juice from Cæcuban.  
"Enough of Rome! 'T was happy to conceive  
"Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave  
"Me of that credit: for the rest, her spite

“Is an old story—serves my folly right  
“ By adding yet another to the dull  
“ List of abortions—things proved beautiful  
“ Could they be done, Sordello cannot do.”

He sat upon the terrace, plucked and threw  
The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift  
Rome’s walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift  
Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,  
Mounds of all majesty. “Thou archetype,  
“ Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart!”

And then a low voice wound into his heart:  
“Sordello!” (low as some old Pythoness  
Conceding to a Lydian King’s distress  
The cause of his long error—one mistake  
Of her past oracle) “Sordello, wake!  
“God has conceded two sights to a man—  
“One, of men’s whole work, time’s completed plan,  
“The other, of the minute’s work, man’s first  
“Step to the plan’s completeness: what’s dispersed  
“Save hope of that supreme step which, descried  
“Earliest, was meant still to remain untried  
“Only to give you heart to take your own  
“Step, and there stay, leaving the rest alone?  
“Where is the vanity? Why count as one  
“The first step, with the last step? What is gone  
“Except Rome’s aëry magnificence,

“ That last step you’d take first?—an evidence  
“ You were God: be man now! Let those glances fall!  
“ The basis, the beginning step of all,  
“ Which proves you just a man—is that gone too?  
“ Pity to disconcert one versed as you  
“ In fate’s ill-nature! but its full extent  
“ Eludes Sordello, even: the veil rent,  
“ Read the black writing—that collective man  
“ Outstrips the individual. Who began  
“ The acknowledged greatnesses? Ay, your own art  
“ Shall serve us: put the poet’s mimes apart—  
“ Close with the poet’s self, and lo, a dim  
“ Yet too plain form divides itself from him!  
“ Alcamo’s song enmeshes the lulled Isle,  
“ Woven into the echoes left erewhile  
“ By Nina, one soft web of song: no more  
“ Turning his name, then, flower-like o’er and o’er!  
“ An elder poet in the younger’s place;  
“ Nina’s the strength, but Alcamo’s the grace:  
“ Each neutralizes each then! Search your fill;  
“ You get no whole and perfect Poet—still  
“ New Ninas, Alcamos, till time’s mid-night  
“ Shrouds all—or better say, the shutting light  
“ Of a forgotten yesterday. Dissect  
“ Every ideal workman—(to reject  
“ In favour of your fearful ignorance

“The thousand phantasms eager to advance,  
“And point you but to those within your reach)—  
“Were you the first who brought—(in modern speech)  
“The Multitude to be materialized ?  
“That loose eternal unrest—who devised  
“An apparition i’ the midst? The rout  
“Was checked, a Breathless ring was formed about  
“That sudden flower: get round at any risk  
“The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk  
“O’ the lily! Swords across it! Reign thy reign  
“And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne!  
“—The very child of over-joyousness,  
“Unfeeling thence, strong therefore: Strength by stress  
“Of Strength comes of that forehead confident,  
“Those widened eyes expecting heart’s content,  
“A calm as out of just-quelled noise; nor swerves  
“For doubt, the ample cheek in gracious curves  
“Abutting on the upthrust nether lip:  
“He wills, how should he doubt then? Ages slip:  
“Was it Sordello prid into the work  
“So far accomplished, and discovered lurk  
“A company amid the other clans,  
“Only distinct in priests for castellans  
“And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed  
“Its rule, their interest its interest,  
“Living for sake of living—there an end,—

“Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend  
“In making adversaries or allies)—  
“Dived you into its capabilities  
“And dared create, out of that sect, a soul  
“Should turn a multitude, already whole,  
“Into its body? Speak plainer! Is ’t so sure  
“God’s church lives by a King’s investiture?  
“Look to last step! A staggering—a shock—  
“What ’s mere sand is demolished, while the rock  
“Endures: a column of black fiery dust  
“Blots heaven—that help was prematurely thrust  
“Aside, perchance!—but air clears, nought’s erased  
“Of the true outline. Thus much being firm based,  
“The other was a scaffold. See him stand  
“Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand  
“Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o’er ply  
“As in a forge; it buries either eye  
“White and extinct, that stupid brow; teeth clenched,  
“The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,  
“As if a cloud enveloped him while fought  
“Under its shade, grim prizers, thought with thought  
“At dead-lock, agonizing he, until  
“The victor thought leap radiant up, and Will,  
“The slave with folded arms and drooping lids  
“They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.  
“Call him no flower—a mandrake of the earth,

“ Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,  
“ Rather,—a fruit of suffering’s excess,  
“ Thence feeling, therefore stronger: still by stress  
“ Of Strength, work Knowledge! Full three hundred  
    years  
“ Have men to wear away in smiles and tears  
“ Between the two•that nearly seemed to touch,  
“ Observe you! quit one workman and you clutch  
“ Another, letting both their trains go by—  
“ The actors-out of either’s policy,  
“ Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,  
“ Carry the three Imperial crowns across,  
“ Aix’ Iron, Milan’s Silver, and Rome’s Gold—  
“ While Alexander, Innocent uphold  
“ On that, each Papal key—but, link on link,  
“ Why is it neither chain betrays a chink?  
“ How coalesce the small and great? Alack,  
“ For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back!  
“ Do the popes coupled there help Gregory  
“ Alone? Hark—from the hermit Peter’s cry  
“ At Claremont, down to the first serf that says  
“ Friedrich ’s no liege of his while he delays  
“ Getting the Pope’s curse off him! The Crusade—  
“ Or trick of breeding Strength by other aid  
“ Than Strength, is safe. Hark—from the wild harangue  
“ Of Vimmercato, to the carroch’s clang

“Yonder! The League—or trick of turning Strength  
“Against Pernicious Strength, is safe at length.  
“Yet hark—from Mantuan Albert making cease  
“The fierce ones, to Saint Francis preaching peace  
“Yonder! God’s Truce—or trick to supersede  
“The very Use of Strength, is safe. Indeed  
“We trench upon the future. Who is found  
“To take next step, next age—trail o’er the ground—  
“Shall I say, gourd-like?—not the flower’s display  
“Nor the root’s prowess, but the plenteous way  
“O’ the plant—produced by joy and sorrow, whence  
“Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence?  
“Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No—  
“E’en were Sordello ready to forego  
“His life for this, ‘t were overleaping work  
“Some one has first to do, howe’er it irk,  
“Nor stray a foot’s breadth from the beaten road.  
“Who means to help must still support the load  
“Hildebrand lifted—‘why hast Thou,’ he groaned,  
“‘Imposed on me a burthen, Paul had moaned,  
“‘And Moses dropped beneath?’ Much done—and yet  
“Doubtless that grandest task God ever set  
“On man, left much to do: at his arm’s wrench,  
“Charlemagne’s scaffold fell; but pillars blench  
“Merely, start back again—perchance have been  
“Taken for buttresses: crash every screen,

“ Hammer the tenons better, and engage  
“ A gang about your work, for the next age  
“ Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part  
“ By Knowledge ! Then, indeed, perchance may start  
“ Sordello on his race—would time divulge  
“ Such secrets ! If one step’s awry, one bulge  
“ Calls for correction by a step we thought  
“ Got over long since, why, till that is wrought,  
“ No progress ! And the scaffold in its turn  
“ Becomes, its service o’er, a thing to spurn.  
“ Meanwhile, if your half-dozen years of life  
“ In store dispose you to forego the strife,  
“ Who takes exception ? Only bear in mind  
“ Ferrara ’s reached, Goito ’s left behind :  
“ As you then were, as half yourself, desist !  
“ —The warrior-part of you may, an it list,  
“ Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,  
“ Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys  
“ By wielding such in fancy,—what is bard  
“ Of you may spurn the vehicle that marred  
“ Elys so much, and in free fancy glut  
“ His sense, yet write no verses—you have but  
“ To please yourself for law, and once could please  
“ What once appeared yourself, by dreaming these  
“ Rather than doing these, in days gone by.  
“ But all is changed the moment you descriy

“ Mankind as half yourself,—then, fancy’s trade  
“ Ends once and always : how may half evade  
“ The other half? men are found half of you.  
“ Out of a thousand helps, just one or two  
“ Can be accomplished presently : but flinch  
“ From these (as from the faulchion, raised an inch,  
“ Elys, described a couplet) and make proof  
“ Of fancy,—then, while one half lolls aloof  
“ I’ the vines, completing Rome to the tip-top—  
“ See if, for that, your other half will stop  
“ A tear, begin a smile ! The rabble’s woes,  
“ Ludicrous in their patience as they chose  
“ To sit about their town and quietly  
“ Be slaughtered,—the poor reckless soldiery,  
“ With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how  
“ ‘ Polt-foot,’ sang they, ‘ was in a pitfall now,’  
“ Cheering each other from the engine-mounts,—  
“ That crippled spawling idiot who recounts  
“ How, lopped of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,  
“ Till the pains crept from out him one by one,  
“ And wriggles round the archers on his head  
“ To earn a morsel of their chestnut bread,—  
“ And Cino, always in the self-same place  
“ Weeping ; beside that other wretch’s case,  
“ Eyepits to ear, one gangrene since he plied  
“ The engine in his coat of raw sheep’s hide

“A double watch in the noon sun ; and see  
“Lucchino, beauty, with the favours free,  
“Trim hacqueton, spruce beard and scented hair,  
“Campaigning it for the first time—cut there  
“In two already, boy enough to crawl  
“For latter orpine round the southern wall,  
“Tomà, where Richard’s kept, because that whore  
“Marfisa, the fool never saw before,  
“Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege :  
“And Tiso’s wife—men liked their pretty liege,  
“Cared for her least of whims once,—Berta, wed  
“A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso’s dead,  
“Delivering herself of his first child  
“On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled  
“To fifty gazers ! ”—(Here a wind below  
Made moody music augural of woe  
From the pine barrier)—“ What if, now the scene  
“Draws to a close, yourself have really been  
“—You, plucking purples in Goito’s moss  
“Like edges of a trabea (not to cross  
“Your consul-humour) or dry aloe-shafts  
“For fasces, at Ferrara—he, fate wafts,  
“This very age, her whole inheritance  
‘Of opportunities? Yet you advance  
“Upon the last! Since talking is your trade,

“ There’s Salinguerra left you to persuade :  
“ Fail ! then ”—

“ No—no—which latest chance secure ! ”

Leaped up and cried Sordello : “ this made sure,  
“ The past were yet redeemable ; its work  
“ Was—help the Guelfs, whom I, howe’er it irk,  
“ Thus help ! ” He shook the foolish aloe-haulm  
Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm  
To the appointed presence. The large head  
Turned on its socket ; “ And your spokesman,” said  
The large voice, “ is Elcorte’s happy sprout ?  
“ Few such ”—(so finishing a speech no doubt  
Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)  
“ —My sober councils have diversified.  
“ Elcorte’s son ! good : forward as you may,  
“ Our lady’s minstrel with so much to say ! ”  
The hesitating sunset floated back,  
Rosily traversed in the wonted track  
The chamber, from the lattice o’er the girth  
Of pines, to the huge eagle blacked in earth  
Opposite,—outlined sudden, spur to crest,  
That solid Salinguerra, and caressed  
Palma’s contour ; ’t was day looped back night’s pall ;  
Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech  
Meant to compensate for the past and reach

Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite  
To his noon's labour, so proceed till night  
Leisurely! The great argument to bind  
Taurello with the Guelf Cause, body and mind,  
—Came the consummate rhetoric to that?  
Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat  
Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,  
Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke.  
Was 't not a touching incident—so prompt  
A rendering the world its just accompt,  
Once proved its debtor? Who 'd suppose, before  
This proof, that he, Goito's god of yore,  
At duty's instance could demean himself  
So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf?  
Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,  
His inmost self at the out-portion peeped,  
Thus occupied; then stole a glance at those  
Appealed to, curious if her colour rose  
Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged  
The need of Lombardy becoming purged  
At soonest of her barons; the poor part  
Abandoned thus, missing the blood at heart  
And spirit in brain, unseasonably off  
Elsewhere! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,  
Good-humoured Salinguerra, famed for tact  
And tongue, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked

The right phrase, and harangued Honorius dumb  
At his accession,—looked as all fell plumb  
To purpose and himself found interest  
In every point his new instructor pressed  
—Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal  
To scrutinize Sordello head and heel.  
He means to yield assent sure? No, alas!  
All he replied was, “What, it comes to pass  
“That poesy, sooner than politics,  
“Makes fade young hair?” To think such speech could  
    fix  
Taurello!

Then a flash of bitter truth:  
So fantasies could break and fritter youth  
That he had long ago lost earnestness,  
Lost will to work, lost power to even express  
The need of working! Earth was turned a grave:  
No more occasions now, though he should crave  
Just one, in right of superhuman toil,  
To do what was undone, repair such spoil,  
Alter the past—nothing would give the chance!  
Not that he was to die; he saw askance  
Protract the ignominious years beyond  
To dream in—time to hope and time despond,  
Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice  
As saved a trouble; he might, at his choice,

One way or other, idle life out, drop  
No few smooth verses by the way—for prop,  
A thyrsus, these sad people, all the same,  
Should pick up, and set store by,—far from blame,  
Plant o'er his hearse, convinced his better part  
Survived him. “ Rather tear men out the heart  
“ O’ the truth !”—Sordello muttered, and renewed  
His propositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra, who at this attack  
Had thrown great breast and ruffling corslet back  
To hear the better, smilingly resumed  
His task ; beneath, the carroch’s warning boomed ;  
He must decide with Tito ; courteously  
He turned then, even seeming to agree  
With his admonisher—“ Assist the Pope,  
“ Extend Guelf domination, fill the scope  
“ O’ the Church, thus based on All, by All, for All—  
“ Change Secular to Evangelical”—  
Echoing his very sentence : all seemed lost,  
When suddenly he looked up, laughingly almost,  
To Palma : “ This opinion of your friend’s—  
“ For instance, would it answer Palma’s ends ?  
“ Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength”—  
(Here he drew out his baldric to its length)  
—“ To the Pope’s Knowledge—let our captive slip,  
“ Wide to the walls throw ope our gates, equip

"Azzo with . . . what I hold here ! Who 'll subscribe  
 "To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe  
 "Henceforward? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,  
 " 'Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust !'  
 " —When Constance, for his couplets, would promote  
 "Alcamo, from a parti-coloured coat,  
 "To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.  
 "Not that I see where couplet-making jars  
 "With common sense : at Mantua I had borne  
 "This chanted, better than their most forlorn  
 "Of bull-baits,—that 's indisputable !"

Brave!

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save !  
 All 's at an end : a Troubadour suppose  
 Mankind will class him with their friends or foes?  
 A puny uncouth ailing vassal think  
 The world and him bound in some special link ?  
 Abrupt the visionary tether burst.  
 What were rewarded here, or what amerced  
 If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream  
 Deservingly, got tangled by his theme  
 So far as to conceit the knack or gift  
 Or whatsoe'er it be, of verse, might lift  
 The globe, a lever like the hand and head  
 Of—"Men of Action," as the Jongleurs said,  
 —"The Great Men," in the people's dialect ?

And not a moment did this scorn affect  
Sordello : scorn the poet? They, for once,  
Asking "what was," obtained a full response.  
Bid Naddo think at Mantua—he had but  
To look into his promptuary, put  
Finger on a set thought in a set speech:  
But was Sordello fitted thus for each  
Conjecture? Nowise; since within his soul,  
Perception brooded unexpressed and whole.  
A healthy spirit like a healthy frame  
Craves aliment in plenty—all the same,  
Changes, assimilates its aliment.  
Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent?  
Next day no formularies more you saw  
Than figs or olives in a sated maw.  
'T is Knowledge, whither such perceptions tend;  
They lose themselves in that, means to an end,  
The many old producing some one new,  
A last unlike the first. If lies are true,  
The Caliph's wheel-work man of brass receives  
A meal, munched millet grains and lettuce leaves  
Together in his stomach rattle loose;  
• You find them perfect next day to produce:  
But ne'er expect the man, on strength of that,  
Can roll an iron camel-collar flat  
Like Haroun's self! I tell you, what was stored

Bit by bit through Sordello's life, outpoured  
That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing :  
And round those three the People formed a ring,  
Of visionary judges whose award  
He recognised in full—faces that barred  
Henceforth return to the old careless life,  
In whose great presence, therefore, his first strife  
For their sake must not be ignobly fought ;  
All these, for once, approved of him, he thought,  
Suspended their own vengeance, chose await  
The issue of this strife to reinstate  
Them in the right of taking it—in fact  
He must be proved king ere they could exact  
Vengeance for such king's defalcation. Last,  
A reason why the phrases flowed so fast  
Was in his quite forgetting for a time  
Himself in his amazement that the rhyme  
Disguised the royalty so much : he there—  
And Salinguerra yet all-unaware  
Who was the lord, who liegeman !

“ Thus I lay

“ On thine my spirit and compel obey  
“ His lord,—my liegeman,—impotent to build  
“ Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled  
“ In what such builder should have been, as brook  
“ One shame beyond the charge that I forsook

“ His function ! Free me from that shame, I bend  
“ A brow before, suppose new years to spend,—  
“ Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur—  
“ Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur  
“ At any crowd he claims ! That I must cede  
“ Shamed now, my right to my especial meed—  
“ Confess thee fitter help the world than I  
“ Ordained its champion from eternity,  
“ Is much : but to behold thee scorn the post  
“ I quit in thy behalf—to hear thee boast  
“ What makes my own despair ! ” And while he rung  
The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung,  
The sad walls of the presence-chamber died  
Into the distance, or embowering vied  
With far-away Goito’s vine-frontier ;  
And crowds of faces—(only keeping clear  
The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground  
To fight their battle from)—deep clustered round  
Sordello, with good wishes no mire breath,  
Kind prayers for him no vapour, since, come death  
Come life, he was fresh-sincwed every joint,  
Each bone new-marrowed as whom gods anoint  
Though mortal to their rescue. Now let sprawl  
The snaky volumes hither ! Is Typhon all  
For Hercules to trample—good report  
From Salinguerra only to extort ?

“ So was I ” (closed he his inculcating  
A poet must be earth’s essential king)  
“ So was I, royal so, and if I fail,  
“ T is not the royalty, ye witness quail,  
“ But one deposed who, caring not exert  
“ Its proper essence, trifled malapert  
“ With accidents instead—good kings assigned  
“ As heralds of a better thing behind—  
“ And, worthy through display of these, put forth  
“ Never the inmost all-surpassing worth  
“ That constitutes him king precisely since  
“ As yet no other spirit may evince  
“ Its like : the power he took most pride to test,  
“ Whereby all forms of life had been professed  
“ At pleasure, forms already on the earth,  
“ Was but a means to power beyond, whose birth  
“ Should, in its novelty, be kingship’s proof.  
“ Now, whether he came near or kept aloof  
“ The several forms he longed to imitate,  
“ Not there the kingship lay, he sees too late,  
“ Those forms, unalterable first as last,  
“ Proved him her copier, not the protoplast  
“ Of nature : what would come of being free,  
“ By action to exhibit tree for tree,  
“ Bird, beast, for beast and bird, or prove earth bore  
“ One veritable man or woman more?

“ Means to an end, such proofs are : what the end?  
“ Let essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend—  
“ Never contract. Already you include  
“ The multitude ; then let the multitude  
“ Include yourself ; and the result were new :  
“ Themselves before, the multitude turn you.  
“ This were to live and move and have, in them,  
“ Your being, and secure a diadem  
“ You should transmit (because no cycle yearns  
“ Beyond itself, but on itself returns)  
“ When, the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid  
“ Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed  
“ Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still  
“ More potent than the last, of human will,  
“ And some new king depose the old. Of such  
“ Am I—whom pride of this elates too much ?  
“ Safe, rather say, 'mid troops of peers again ;  
“ I, with my words, hailed brother of the train  
“ Deeds once sufficed : for, let the world roll back,  
“ Who fails, through deeds how'e'er diverse, retrack  
“ My purpose still, my task? A teeming crust—  
“ Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict ! Then, needs must  
“ Emerge some Calm embodied, these refer  
“ The brawl to—yellow-bearded Jupiter?  
“ No ! Saturn ; some existence like a pact  
“ And protest against Chaos, some first fact

“I’ the faint of time. My deep of life, I know  
“Is unavailing e’en to poorly show” . . .  
(For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)  
. . . “Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawning  
“The fullest effluence of the finest mind,  
“All in degree, no way diverse in kind  
“From minds about it, minds which, more or less,  
“Lofty or low, move seeking to impress  
“Themselves on somewhat; but one mind has climbe  
“Step after step, by just ascent sublimed.  
“Thought is the soul of act, and, stage by stage,  
“Soul is from body still to disengage  
“As tending to a freedom which rejects  
“Such help and incorporeally affects  
“The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,  
“Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,  
“Assigning them the simpler tasks it used  
“To patiently perform till Song produced  
“Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind: divest  
“Mind of e’en Thought, and, lo, God’s unexpressed  
“Will draws above us! All then is to win  
“Save that. How much for me, then? where begin  
“My work? About me, faces! and they flock,  
“The earnest faces. What shall I unlock  
“By song? behold me prompt, whate’er it be,  
“To minister: how much can mortals see

“ Of Life? No more than so? I take the task  
“ And marshal you Life’s elemental masque,  
“ Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,  
“ This light, this shade make prominent, suppress  
“ All ordinary hues that softening blend  
“ Such natures with the level. Apprehend  
“ Which sinner ~~is~~, which saint, if I allot  
“ Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, a blaze or blot,  
“ To those you doubt concerning! I enwomb  
“ Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb;  
“ Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph  
“ With the black chastening river I engulph!  
“ Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine  
“ With languors of the planet of decline—  
“ These, fail to recognize, to arbitrate  
“ Between henceforth, to rightly estimate  
“ Thus marshalled in the masque! Myself, the while,  
“ As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile  
“ At my own showing! Next age—what’s to do?  
“ The men and women stationed hitherto  
“ Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct  
“ Each nature to its farthest, or obstruct  
“ At soonest, in the world: light, thwarted, breaks  
“ A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,  
“ Or shadow, massed, freezes to gloom: behold  
“ How such, with fit assistance to unfold,

“Or obstacles to crush them, disengage

“Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war  
wage,

“In presence of you all! Myself, implied

“Superior now, as, by the platform’s side,

“I bade them do and suffer,—would last content

“The world . . . no—that’s too far! I circumvent

“A few, my masque contented, and to these

“Offer unveil the last of mysteries—

“Man’s inmost life shall have yet freer play:

“Once more I cast external things away,

“And natures composite, so decompose

“That” . . . Why, he writes *Sordello!*

“How I rose,

“And how have you advanced! since evermore

“Yourselves effect what I was fain before

“Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,

“What I leave bare yourselves can now invest.

“How we attain to talk as brothers talk,

“In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk

“From discontinuing old aids. To-day

“Takes in account the work of Yesterday:

“Has not the world a Past now, its adept

“Consults ere he dispense with or accept

“New aids? a single touch more may enhance,

“A touch less turn to insignificance

“ Those structures’ symmetry the past has strewed  
“ The world with, once so bare. Leave the mere rude  
“ Explicit details ! ’t is but brother’s speech  
“ We need, speech where an accent’s change gives each  
“ The other’s soul—no speech to understand  
“ By former audience : need was then to expand,  
“ Expatriate—hardly were we brothers ! true—  
“ Nor I lament my small remove from you,  
“ Nor reconstruct what stands already. Ends  
“ Accomplished turn to means : my art intends  
“ New structure from the ancient : as they changed  
“ The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged  
“ The horned and snouted Libyan god, upright  
“ As in his desert, by some simple bright  
“ Clay cinerary pitcher—Thebes as Rome,  
“ Athens as Byzant rifted, till their Dome  
“ From earth’s reputed consummations razed  
“ A seal, the all-transmuting Triad blazed  
“ Above. Ah, whose that fortune? Ne’ertheless  
“ E’en he must stoop contented to express  
“ No tithe of what ’s to say—the vehicle  
“ Never sufficient : but his work is still  
“ For faces like the faces that select  
“ The single service I am bound effect,—  
“ That bid me cast aside such fancies, bow  
“ Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow

“The Kaiser’s coming—which with heart, soul, strength,  
“I labour for, this eve, who feel at length  
“My past career’s outrageous vanity,  
“And would, as its amends, die, even die  
“Now I first estimate the boon of life,  
“If death might win compliance—sure, this strife  
“Is right for once—the People my support.”

My poor Sordello ! what may we extort  
By this, I wonder? Palma’s lighted eyes  
Turned to Taurello who, long past surprise,  
Began, “You love him—what you ’d say at large  
“Let me say briefly. First, your father’s charge  
“To me, his friend, peruse : I guessed indeed  
“You were no stranger to the course decreed.  
“He bids me leave his children to the saints :  
“As for a certain project, he acquaints  
“The Pope with that, and offers him the best  
“Of your possessions to permit the rest  
“Go peaceably—to Ecelin, a stripe  
“Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,  
“—To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan  
“Clutches already ; extricate, who can,  
“Treville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,  
“Loria and Cartiglione !—all must go,  
“And with them go my hopes. ’T is lost, then ! Lost  
“This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost

“ Procuring ; thirty years—as good I’d spent  
“ Like our admonisher ! But each his bent  
“ Pursues : no question, one might live absurd  
“ Oneself this while, by deed as he by word  
“ Persisting to obtrude an influence where  
“ T is made account of, much as . . . nay, you fare  
“ With twice the fortune, youngster !—I submit,  
“ Happy to parallel my waste of wit  
“ With the renowned Sordello’s: you decide  
“ A course for me. Romano may abide  
“ Romano,—Bacchus ! After all, what dearth  
“ Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth ?  
“ Say there ’s a prize in prospect, must disgrace  
“ Betide competitors, unless they style  
“ Themselves Romano? Were it worth my while  
“ To try my own luck ! But an obscure place  
“ Suits me—there wants a youth to bustle, stalk  
“ And attitudinize—some fight, more talk,  
“ Most flaunting badges—how, I might make clear  
“ Since Friedrich’s very purposes lie here  
“ —Here, pity they are like to lie ! For me,  
“ With station fixed unceremoniously  
“ Long since, small use contesting ; I am but  
“ The liegeman—you are born the lieges : shut  
“ That gentle mouth now ! or resume your kin  
“ In your sweet self; were Palma Ecelin

“For me to work with ! Could that neck endure  
“This bauble for a cumbrous garniture,  
“She should . . . or might one bear it for her? Stay—  
“I have not been so flattered many a day  
“As by your pale friend—Bacchus ! The least help  
“Would lick the hind’s fawn to a lion’s whelp :  
“His neck is broad enough—a ready tongue  
“Beside : too writhled—but, the main thing, young—  
“I could . . . why, look ye !”

And the badge was thrown  
Across Sordello’s neck : “This badge alone  
“Makes you Romano’s Head—becomes superb  
“On your bare neck, which would, on mine, disturb  
“The pauldron,” said Taurello. A mad act,  
Nor even dreamed about before—in fact,  
Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce—  
But he had dallied overmuch, this once,  
With power: the thing was done, and he, aware  
The thing was done, proceeded to declare—  
(So like a nature made to serve, excel  
In serving, only feel by service well !)  
—That he would make Sordello that and more.  
“As good a scheme as any. What’s to pore  
“At in my face?” he asked—“ponder instead  
“This piece of news ; you are Romano’s Head !  
“One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,

“Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole  
“This time ! For you there ’s Palma to espouse—  
“For me, one crowning trouble ere I house  
“ Like my compeer.”

On which ensued a strange  
And solemn’ visitation ; there came change  
O’er every one of them ; each looked on each :  
Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech.  
And when the giddiness sank and the haze  
Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,  
Sordello with the baldric on, his sire  
Silent, though his proportions seemed aspire  
Momently ; and, interpreting the thrill,—  
Night at its ebb,—Palma was found there still  
Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed  
A year ago, while dying on her breast,—  
Of a contrivance, that Vicenza night  
When Ecelin had birth. “ Their convoy’s flight,  
“ Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame  
“ That wallowed like a dragon at his game  
“ The toppling city through—San Biagio rocks !  
“ And wounded lies in her delicious locks  
“ Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,  
“ None of her wasted, just in one embrace  
“ Covering her child : when, as they lifted her,  
“ Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier

“ And mightiest Taurello’s cry outbroke,  
“ Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,  
“ Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward—drown  
“ His colleague Ecelin’s clamour, up and down  
“ The disarray : failed Adelaide see then  
“ Who was the natural chief, the man of men?  
“ Outstripping time, her infant thefe burst swathe,  
“ Stood up with eyes haggard beyond the scathe  
“ From wandering after his heritage  
“ Lost once and lost for aye : and why that rage,  
“ That deprecating glance? A new shape leant  
“ On a familiar shape—gloatingly bent  
“ O’er his discomfiture ; ’mid wreaths it wore,  
“ Still one outflamed the rest—her child’s before  
“ ’T was Salinguerra’s for his child : scorn, hate,  
“ Rage now might startle her when all too late!  
“ Then was the moment!—rival’s foot had spurned  
“ Never that House to earth else! Sense returned—  
“ The act conceived, adventured and complete,  
“ They bore away to an obscure retreat  
“ Mother and child—Retrude’s self not slain”  
(Nor even here Taurello moved) “ though pain  
“ Was fled ; and what assured them most ’t was fled,  
“ All pain, was, if they raised the pale hushed head  
“ ’T would turn this way and that, waver awhile,  
“ And only settle into its old smile—

“ (Graceful as the disquieted water-flag  
“ Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag  
“ On either side their path)—when suffered look  
“ Down on her child. They marched: no sign once  
    shook  
“ The company’s close litter of crossed spears  
“ Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears  
“ Slipped in the sunset from her long black lash,  
“ And she was gone. So far the action rash;  
“ No crime. They laid Retrude in the font,  
“ Taurello’s very gift, her child was wont  
“ To sit beneath—constant as eve he came  
“ To sit by its attendant girls the same  
“ As one of them. For Palma, she would blend  
“ With this magnific spirit to the end,  
“ That ruled her first; but scarcely had she dared  
“ To disobey the Adelaide who scared  
“ Her into vowing never to disclose  
“ A secret to her husband, which so froze  
“ His blood at half-recital, she contrived  
“ To hide from him Taurello’s infant lived,  
“ Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar  
“ Romano’s fortunes. And, a crime so far,  
“ Palma received that action: she was told  
“ Of Salinguerra’s nature, of his cold  
“ Calm acquiescence in his lot! But free

"To impart the secret to Romano, she  
"Engaged to repossess Sordello of  
"His heritage, and hers, and that way doff  
"The mask, but after years, long years: while now,  
"Was not Romano's sign-mark on that brow?"

Across Taurello's heart his arms were locked:  
And when he did speak 't was as if he mocked  
The minstrel, "who had not to move," he said,  
"Nor stir—should fate defraud him of a shred  
"Of his son's infancy? much less his youth!"  
(Laughingly all this)—"which to aid, in truth,  
"Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown  
"Old, not too old—'t was best they kept alone  
"Till now, and never idly met till now;"  
—Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how  
All intimations of this eve's event  
Were lies, for Friedrich must advance to Trent,  
Thence to Verona, then to Rome, there stop,  
Tumble the Church down, institute a-top  
The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy:  
—"That's now!—no prophesying what may be  
"Anon, with a new monarch of the clime,  
"Native of Gesi, passing his youth's prime  
"At Naples. Tito bids my choice decide  
"On whom . . ."

"Embrace him, madman!" Palma cried,

Who through the laugh saw sweat-drops burst apace,  
And his lips blanching : he did not embrace  
Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand  
On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.

Understand,

This while Sordello was becoming flushed  
Out of his whiteness ; thoughts rushed, fancies rushed ;  
He pressed his hand upon his head and signed  
Both should forbear him. " Nay, the best 's behind ! "

Taurello laughed—not quite with the same laugh :

" The truth is, thus we scatter, ay, like chaff  
" These Guelfs, a despicable monk recoils  
" From : nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils  
" Our triumph !—Friedrich ? Think you, I intcnd  
" Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend  
" And brain I waste ? Think you, the people clap  
" Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap  
" For any Friedrich to fill up ? 'T is mine—  
" That 's yours : I tell you, towards some such design  
" Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,  
" And for another, yes—but worked no less  
" With instinct at my heart ; I else had swerved,  
" While now—look round ! My cunning has preserved  
" Samminiato—that 's a central place  
" Secures us Florence, boy,—in Pisa's case.  
" By land as she by sea ; with Pisa ours,

"And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours  
"The land at leisure! Gloriously dispersed—  
"Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first  
"That flanked us (ah, you know not !) in the March ;  
"On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,  
"Romagna and Bologna, whose first span  
"Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan ;  
"Sofia's Egna by Bolgiano 's sure!" . . .  
So he proceeded : half of all this, pure  
Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,  
But what was undone he felt sure to do,  
As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away  
The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play—  
Need of the sword now! That would soon adjust  
Aught wrong at present ; to the sword intrust  
Sordello's whiteness, undersize : 't was plain  
He hardly rendered right to his own brain—  
Like a brave hound, men educate to pride  
Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside,  
As though he could not, gift by gift, match men!  
Palma had listened patiently : but when  
'T was time expostulate, attempt withdraw  
Taurello from his child, she, without awe  
Took off his iron arms from, one by one,  
Sordello's shrinking shoulders, and, that done,  
Made him avert his visage and relieve

Sordello (you might see his corslet heave  
The while) who, loose, rose—tried to speak, then sank:  
They left him in the chamber. All was blank.  
And even reeling down the narrow stair  
Taurello kept up, as though unaware  
Palma was by to guide him, the old device  
—Something of Milan—“ how we muster thrice  
“ The Torriani’s strength there; all along  
“ Our own Visconti cowed them ”—thus the song .  
Continued even while she bade him stoop,  
Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,  
The turnings to the gallery below,  
Where he stopped short as Palma let him go.  
When he had sat in silence long enough  
Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff  
She stopped the truncheon ; only to commence  
One of Sordello’s poems, a pretence  
For speaking, some poor rhyme of “ Elys’ hair  
“ And head that ’s sharp and perfect like a pear,  
“ So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks  
“ Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks  
“ Sun-blanch’d the livelong summer ”—from his worst  
Performance, the Goito, as his first :  
And that at end, conceiving from the brow  
And open mouth no silence would serve now,  
Went on to say the whole world loved that man

And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,  
Eclipsed the Count's—he sucking in each phrase  
As if an angel spoke. The foolish praise  
Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made  
Her face a framework with his hands, a shade,  
A crown, an aureole : there must she remain  
(Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain  
As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)  
To get the best look at, in fittest niche  
Dispose his saint. That done, he kissed her brow,  
—“Lauded her father for his treason now,”  
He told her, “only, how could one suspect  
“The wit in him?—whose clansman, recollect,  
‘Was ever Salinguerra—she, the same,  
“Romano and his lady—so, might claim  
“To know all, as she should”—and thus begun  
Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes,  
“not one  
“Fit to be told that foolish boy,” he said,  
“But only let Sordello Palma wed,  
“—Then!”

’T was a dim long narrow place at best:  
Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West,  
As shows its corpse the world's end some split tomb—  
A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom,  
Faced Palma—but at length Taurello set

Her free ; the grating held one ragged jet  
Of fierce gold fire : he lifted her within  
The hollow underneath—how else begin  
Fate's second marvellous cycle, else renew  
The ages than with Palma plain in view ?  
Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,  
Pursuing his discourse ; a grand unchecked  
Monotony made out from his quick talk  
And the recurring noises of his walk ;  
—Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent  
Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,  
Who hearten each the other against heart ;  
Boasting there 's nought to care for, when, apart  
The boaster, all 's to care for. He, beside  
Some shape not visible, in power and pride  
Approached, out of the dark, ginglymly near,  
Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear  
Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,  
Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,  
And on he strode into the opposite dark,  
Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark  
I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed throng  
That crashed against the angle aye so long  
After the last, punctual to an amount  
Of mailed great paces you could not but count,—  
Prepared you for the pacing back again.

And by the snatches you might ascertain  
That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left  
By this alone in Italy, they cleft  
Asunder, crushed together, at command  
Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,  
Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne—  
But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, “if we deign  
“Accept that compromise and stoop to give  
“Rome law, the Cæsar's Representative.”  
Enough, that the illimitable flood  
Of triumphs after triumphs, understood  
In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed  
Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed  
Him on till, these long quiet in their graves,  
He found 't was looked for that a whole life's braves  
Should somehow be made good; so, weak and worn,  
Must stagger up at Milan, one grey morn  
Of the to-come, and fight his latest fight.  
But, Salinguerra's prophecy at height—  
He voulble with a raised arm and stiff,  
A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if  
He had our very Italy to keep  
Or cast away, or gather in a heap  
To garrison the better—ay, his word  
Was, “run the cucumber into a gourd,  
“Drive Trent upon Apulia”—at their pitch

Who spied the continents and islands which  
Grew mulberry leaves and sickles, in the map—  
(Strange that three such confessions so should hap  
To Palma, Dante spoke with in the clear  
Amorous silence of the swooning-sphere,—  
*Cunizza*, as he called her! Never ask  
Of Palma more! She sat, knowing her task  
Was done, the labour of it,—for, success  
Concerned not Palma, passion's votaress.)  
Triumph at neight, and thus Sordello crowned—  
Above the passage suddenly a sound  
Stops speech, stops walk: back shrinks Taurello, bids  
With large involuntary asking lids,  
Palma interpret. “ ‘T is his own foot-stamp—  
“ Your hand! His summons! Nay, this idle damp  
“ Befits not!” Out they two reeled dizzily.  
“ Visconti’s strong at Milan,” resumed he,  
In the old, somewhat insignificant way—  
(Was Palma wont, years afterward, to say)  
As though the spirit’s flight, sustained thus far,  
Dropped at that very instant.

Gone they are—

‘Palma, Taurello; Eglamor anon,  
Ecelin,—only Naddo’s never gone!  
—Labours, this moonrise, what the Master meant:  
“ Is Squarcialupo speckled?—purulent,

"I'd say, but when was Providence put out?  
"He carries somehow handily about  
"His spite nor fouls himself!" Goito's vines  
Stand like a cheat detected—stark rough lines,  
The moon breaks through, a grey mean scale against  
The vault where, this eve's Maiden, thou remain'st  
Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed—who can tell?  
As Heaven, now all's at end, did not so well,  
Spite of the faith and victory, to leave  
Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve.  
While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha! wait  
No longer: these in compass, forward fate!

## BOOK THE SIXTH.

THE thought of Eglamor's least like a thought,  
And yet a false one, was, "Man shrinks to nought  
"If matched with symbols of immensity ;  
"Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky  
"Or sea, too little for their quietude :"  
And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood  
Confirmed its speciousness, while eve slow sank  
Down the near terrace to the farther bank,  
And only one spot left from out the night  
Glimmered upon the river opposite—  
A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,  
A sky-like space of water, ray for ray,  
And star for star, one richness where they mixed  
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,  
Tumultuary splendours folded in  
To die. Nor turned he till Ferrara's din  
(Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip  
Who lets some first and eager purpose slip

In a new fancy's birth—the speech keeps on  
Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)  
—Aroused him, surely offered succour. Fate  
Paused with this eve ; ere she precipitate  
Herself,—best put off new strange thoughts awhile,  
That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile,—  
What help to pierce the future as the past  
Lay in the plaining city?

And at last

The main discovery and prime concern,  
All that just now imported him to learn,  
Truth's self, like yonder slow moon to complete  
Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet,  
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,  
Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range  
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked,  
Some other—which of these could he suspect,  
Prying into them by the sudden blaze?  
The real way seemed made up of all the ways—  
Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;  
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,  
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense  
Demanding only outward influence,  
A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,  
Power to uplift his power,—such moon's control  
Over such sea-depths,—and their mass had swept

Onward from the beginning and still kept  
Its course : but years and years the sky above  
Held none, and so, untasked of any love,  
His sensitiveness idled, now amort,  
Alive now, and, to sullenness or sport  
Given wholly up, disposed itself anew  
At every passing instigation, grew  
And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,  
Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt  
Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race  
Of whitest ripples o'er the reef—found place  
For much display ; not gathered up and, hurled  
Right from its heart, encompassing the world.  
So had Sordello been, by consequence,  
Without a function : others made pretence  
To strength not half his own, yet had some core  
Within, submitted to some moon, before  
Them still, superior still whate'er their force,—  
Were able therefore to fulfil a course,  
Nor missed life's crown, authentic attribute.  
To each who lives must be a certain fruit  
Of having lived in his degree,—a stage,  
Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,  
To stop at ; and to this the spirits tend  
Who, still discovering beauty without end,  
Amass the scintillations, make one star

—Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar,—  
And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest  
By winning it to notice and invest  
Their souls with alien glory, some one day  
Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape alway,  
Round to the perfect circle—soon or late,  
According as themselves are formed to wait ;  
Whether mere human beauty will suffice  
—The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,  
Or human intellect seem best, or each  
Combine in some ideal form past reach  
On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,  
Some love, hate even, take their place, the same,  
So to be served—all this they do not lose,  
Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose  
What must be Hell—a progress thus pursued  
Through all existence, still above the food  
That 's offered them, still fain to reach beyond  
The widened range, in virtue of their bond  
Of sovereignty. Not that a Palma's Love,  
A Salinguerra's Hate, would equal prove  
To swaying all Sordello : but why doubt  
Some love meet for such strength, some moon without  
Would match his sea?—or fear, Good manifest,  
Only the Best breaks faith ?—Ah but the Best  
Somehow eludes us ever, still might be

And is not ! Crave we gems ? No penury  
Of their material round us ! Pliant earth  
And plastic flame—what balks the mage his birth  
—Jacinth in balls or lodestone by the block ?  
Flinders enrich the strand, veins swell the rock ;  
Nought more ! Seek creatures ? Life 's i' the tempest,  
thought

Clothes the keen hill-top, mid-day woods are fraught  
With fervours : human forms are well enough !  
But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff  
Profuse at nature's pleasure, men beyond  
These actual men !—and thus are over-fond  
In arguing, from Good—the Best, from force  
Divided—force combined, an ocean's course  
From this our sea whose mere intestine pants  
Might seem at times sufficient to our wants.

External power ! If none be adequate,  
And he stand forth ordained (a prouder fate)  
Himself a law to his own sphere ? “ Remove  
“ All incompleteness !” for that law, that love ?  
Nay, if all other laws be feints,—truth veiled  
Helpfully to weak vision that had failed  
To grasp aught but its special want,—for lure,  
Embodyed ? Stronger vision could endure  
The unbodied want : no part—the whole of truth !  
The People were himself; nor, by the ruth

At their condition, was he less impelled  
To alter the discrepancy beheld,  
Than if, from the sound whole, a sickly part  
Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,  
Then palmed on him as alien woe—the Guelf  
To succour, proud that he forsook himself.  
All is himself; all service, therefore, rates  
Alike, nor serving one part, immolates  
The rest: but all in time! “That lance of yours  
“Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors,  
“That buckler’s lined with many a giant’s beard  
“Ere long, our champion, be the lance upreared,  
“The buckler wielded handsomely as now!  
“But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,  
“Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,  
“And, if you hope we struggle through the flat,  
“Put lance and buckler by! Next half-month lacks  
“Mere sturdy exercise of mace and axe  
“To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pears  
“Which bristling holds Cydippe by the hair,  
“Lames barefoot Agathon: this felled, we’ll try  
“The picturesque achievements by and by—  
“Next life!”

Ay, rally, mock, O People, urge  
Your claims!—for thus he ventured, to the verge,  
Push a vain mummery which perchance distrust

Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust  
Likewise? accordingly the Crowd—(as yet  
He had unconsciously contrived forget  
I the whole, to dwell o' the points . . . one might assuage  
The signal horrors easier than engage  
With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief  
Not to be fancied off, nor gained relief  
In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,  
But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work  
To correspond . . .) this Crowd then, forth they stood.  
“And now content thy stronger vision, brood  
“On thy bare want; uncovered, turf by turf,  
“Study the corpse-face thro’ the taint-worms’ scurf!”  
Down sank the People’s Then; uprose their Now.  
These sad ones render service to! And how  
Piteously little must that service prove  
—Had surely proved in any case! for, move  
Each other obstacle away, let youth  
Become aware it had surprised a truth  
‘T were service to impart—can truth be seized,  
Settled forthwith, and, of the captive eased,  
Its captor find fresh prey, since this alit  
So happily, no gesture luring it,  
The earnest of a flock to follow? Vain,  
Most vain! a life to spend ere this he chain  
To the poor crowd’s complacence: ere the crowd

Pronounce it captured, he descries a cloud  
Its kin of twice the plume ; which he, in turr,  
If he shall live as many lives, may learn  
How to secure : not else. Then Mantua called  
Back to his mind how certain bards were thralled  
—Buds blasted, but of breath more like perfume  
Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion bloom ;  
Some insane rose that burnt heart out in sweets,  
A spendthrift in the spring, no summer greets ;  
Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,  
Grown bestial, dreaming how become divine.  
Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence  
With the commencement, merits crowning ! Hence  
Must truth be casual truth, elicited  
In sparks so mean, at intervals disspread  
So rarely, that 't is like at no one time  
Of the world's story has not truth, the prime  
Of truth, the very truth which, loosed, had hurled  
The world's course right, been really in the world  
—Content the while with some mean spark by dint  
Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint  
Of buried fire, which, rip earth's breast, would stream  
Sky-ward !

Sordello's miserable gleam  
Was looked for at the moment : he would dash  
This badge. and all it brought, to earth,—abash

Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest  
The Kaiser from his purpose,—would attest  
His own belief, in any case. Before  
He dashes it however, think once more !  
For, were that little, truly service? “Ay,  
“I’ the end, no doubt ; but meantime? Plain you spy  
“Its ultimate effect, but many flaws  
“Of vision blur each intervening cause.  
“Were the day’s fraction clear as the life’s sum  
“Of service, Now as filled as teems To-come  
“With evidence of good—nor too minute  
“A share to vie with evil! No dispute,  
“T were fitliest maintain the Guelfs in rule:  
“That makes your life’s work : but you have to school  
“Your day’s work on these natures circumstanced  
“Thus variously, which yet, as each advanced  
“Or might impede the Guelf rule, must be moved  
“Now, for the Then’s sake,—hating what you loved,  
“Loving old hatreds! Nor if one man bore  
“Brand upon temples while his fellow wore  
“The aureole, would it task you to decide:  
“But, portioned duly out, the future vied  
“Never with the unparcellled present! Smite  
“Or spare so much on warrant all so slight?  
“The present’s complete sympathies to break,  
“Aversions bear with, for a future’s sake

“So feeble? Tito ruined through one speck,  
“The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck?  
“This were work, true, but work performed at cost  
“Of other work; aught gained here, elsewhere lost.  
“For a new segment spoil an orb half-done?  
“Rise with the People one step, and sink—one?  
“Were it but one step, less than the whole face  
“Of things, your novel duty bids erase!  
“Harms to abolish! What, the prophet saith,  
“The minstrel singeth vainly then? Old faith,  
“Old courage, only born because of harms,  
“Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms?  
“Flame may persist; but is not glare as staunch?  
“Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch;  
“Blood dries to crimson; Evil’s beautified  
“In every shape. Thrust Beauty then aside  
“And banish Evil! Wherefore? After all,  
“Is Evil a result less natural  
“Than Good? For overlook the seasons’ strife  
“With tree and flower,—the hideous animal life,  
“(Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt  
“For his solution, and endure the vaunt  
“Of nature’s angel, as a child that knows  
“Himself befooled, unable to propose  
“Aught better than the fooling)—and but care  
“For men, for the mere People then and there,—

“ In these, could you but see that Good and Ill  
“ Claimed you alike ! Whence rose their claim but still  
“ From Ill, as fruit of Ill? What else could knit  
“ You theirs but Sorrow? Any free from it  
“ Were also free from you ! Whose happiness  
“ Could be distinguished in this morning’s press  
“ Of miseries?—the fool’s who passed a gibe  
“ ‘ On thee,’ jeered he, ‘ so wedded to thy tribe,  
“ Thou carriest green and yellow tokens in  
“ Thy very face that thou art Ghibellin !’  
“ Much hold on you that fool obtained ! Nay mount  
“ Yet higher—and upon men’s own account  
“ Must Evil stay : for, what is joy?—to heave  
“ Up one obstruction more, and common leave  
“ What was peculiar, by such act destroy  
“ Itself; a partial death is every joy ;  
“ The sensible escape, enfranchisement  
“ Of a sphere’s essence : once the vexed—content,  
“ The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,  
“ All ’s, to begin again—some novel bound  
“ To break, some new enlargement to entreat ;  
“ The sphere though larger is not more complete.  
“ Now for Mankind’s experience : who alone  
“ Might style the unobstructed world his own?  
“ Whom palled Goito with its perfect things?  
“ Sordello’s self : whereas for Mankind springs

“ Salvation by each hindrance interposed.  
“ They climb ; life’s view is not at once disclosed  
“ To creatures caught up, on the summit left,  
“ Heaven plain above them, yet of wings bereft :  
“ But lower laid, as at the mountain’s foot.  
“ So, range on range, the girdling forests shoot  
“ Twixt your plain prospect and the throngs who scale  
“ Height after height, and pierce mists, veil by veil,  
“ Heartened with each discovery , in their soul,  
“ The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that Whole,  
“ Could they revert, enjoy past gains? The space  
“ Of time you judge so meagre to embrace  
“ The Parts were more than plenty, once attained  
“ The Whole, to quite exhaust it: nought were gained  
“ But leave to look—not leave to do : Beneath  
“ Soon sates the looker—look Above, and Death  
“ Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live  
“ First, and die soon enough, Sordello ! Give  
“ Body and spirit the first right they claim,  
“ And pasture soul on a voluptuous shame  
“ That you, a pageant-city’s denizen,  
“ Are neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men—  
“ Can force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck  
“ Bright attributes away for sordid muck,  
“ Yet manage from that very muck educe  
“ Gold ; then subject. nor scruple, to your cruce

“The world’s discardings! Though real ingots pay  
“Your pains, the clods that yielded them are clay  
“To all beside,—would clay remain, though quenched  
“Your purging-fire; who’s robbed then? Had you  
    wrenched  
“An ampler treasure forth!—As ‘t is, they crave  
“A share that ruins you and will not save  
“Them. Why should sympathy command you quit  
“The course that makes your joy, nor will remit  
“Their woe? Would all arrive at joy? Reverse  
“The order (time instructs you) nor coerce  
“Each unit till, some predetermined mode,  
“The total be emancipate; men’s road  
“Is one, men’s times of travel many, thwart  
“No enterprising soul’s precocious start  
“Before the general march! If slow or fast  
“All straggle up to the same point at last,  
“Why grudge your having gained, a month ago,  
“The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,  
“While they were landlocked? Speed their Then, but  
    how  
“This badge would suffer you improve your Now!”  
    His time of action for, against, or with  
Our world (I labour to extract the pith  
Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide,  
Gigantic with its power of joy, beside

The world's eternity of impotence  
To profit though at his whole joy's expense.  
“ Make nothing of my day because so brief?  
“ Rather make more: instead of joy, use grief  
“ Before its novelty have time subside!  
“ Wait not for the late savour, leave untried  
“ Virtue, the creaming honey-wine, quick squeeze  
“ Vice like a biting spirit from the lees  
“ Of life! Together let wrath, hatred, lust,  
“ All tyrannies in every shape, be thrust  
“ Upon this Now, which time may reason out  
“ As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt;  
“ But long ere then Sordello will have slipt  
“ Away; you teach him at Goito's crypt,  
“ There 's a blank issue to that fiery thrill.  
“ Stirring, the few cope with the many, still:  
“ So much of sand as, quiet, makes a mass  
“ Unable to produce three tufts of grass,  
“ Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void  
“ The whole calm glebe's endeavour: be employed!  
“ And e'en though somewhat smart the Crowd for this,  
“ Contribute each his pang to make your bliss,  
“ T is but one pang—one blood-drop to the bowl  
“ Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl  
“ At last, stains ruddily the dull red cape,  
“ And, kindling orbs grey as the unripe grape

“ Before, avails forthwith to disenchantment  
“ The portent, soon to lead a mystic dance  
“ Among you! For, who sits alone in Rome?  
“ Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home,  
“ And set me there to live? Oh life, life-breath,  
“ Life-blood,—ere sleep, come travail, life ere death!  
“ This life stream on my soul, direct, oblique,  
“ But always streaming! Hindrances? They pique:  
“ Helps? such . . . but why repeat, my soul o'erturns  
“ Each height, then every depth profoundlier drops?  
“ Enough that I can live, and would live! Wait  
“ For some transcendent life reserved by Fate  
“ To follow this? Oh, never! Fate, I trust  
“ The same, my soul to; for, as who flings dust,  
“ Perchance (so facile was the deed) she chequed  
“ The void with these materials to affect  
“ My soul diversely: these consigned anew  
“ To nought by death, what marvel if she threw  
“ A second and superber spectacle  
“ Before me? What may serve for sun, what still  
“ Wander a moon above me? What else wind  
“ About me like the pleasures left behind,  
“ And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh  
“ Cling to me? What's new laughter? Soothes the fresh  
“ Sleep like sleep? Fate's exhaustless for my sake  
“ In brave resource: but whether bids she slake

" My thirst at this first rivulet, or count  
" No draught worth lip save from some rocky fount  
" Above i' the clouds, while here she 's provident  
" Of pure loquacious pearl, the soft tree-tent  
" Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail  
" The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail  
" At bottom? Oh, 't were too absurd to slight  
" For the hereafter the to-day's delight!  
" Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring: wear  
" Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair!  
" Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart  
" Offer to serve, contented for my part  
" To give life up in service,—only grant  
" That I do serve; if otherwise, why want  
" Aught further of me? If men cannot choose  
" But set aside life, why should I refuse  
" The gift? I take it—I, for one, engage  
" Never to falter through my pilgrimage—  
" Nor end it howling that the stock or stone  
" Were enviable, truly: I, for one,  
" Will praise the world, you style mere anteroom  
" To palace—be it so! shall I assume  
" —My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,  
" My mouth the smirk, before the doors fly ope.  
" One moment? What? with guarders row on row,  
" Gay swarms of varlety that come and go,

“ Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlace  
“ The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,  
“ Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for,—laugh  
“ At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff  
“ Cross Beetle-brows the Usher’s shoulder,—why  
“ Admitted to the presence by and by,  
“ Should thought of having lost these make me grieve  
“ Among new joys I reach, for joys I leave?  
“ Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone,  
“ Are floor-work there! But do I let alone  
“ That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule  
“ Once and for ever?—Floor-work? No such fool!  
“ Rather, were heaven to forestall earth, I ’d say  
“ I, is it, must be blest? Then, my own way  
“ Bless me! Giver firmer arm and fleeter foot,  
“ I ’ll thank you: but to no mad wings transmute  
“ These limbs of mine—our greensward was so soft!  
“ Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft:  
“ We feel the bliss distinctlier, having thus  
“ Engines subservient, not mixed up with us.  
“ Better move palpably through heaven: nor, freed  
“ Of flesh, forsooth, from space to space proceed  
“ Mid flying synods of worlds! No: in heaven’s marge  
“ Show Titan still, recumbent o’er his targe  
“ Solid with stars—the Centaur at his game,  
“ Made tremulously out in hoary flame!

"Life! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull  
"Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at fall,  
"Aside so oft; the death I fly, revealed  
"So oft a better life this life concealed,  
"And which sage, champion, martyr, through each path  
"Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,  
"The crippling-irons and the fiery chair.  
"T was well for them ; let me become aware  
"As they, and I relinquish life, too ! Let  
"What masters life disclose itself ! Forget  
"Vain ordinances, I have one appeal—  
"I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel ;  
"So much is truth to me. What Is, then ? Since  
"One object, viewed diversely, may evince  
"Beauty and ugliness—this way attract,  
"That way repel,—why gloze upon the fact?  
"Why must a single of the sides be right?  
"What bids choose this and leave the opposite?  
"Where 's abstract Right for me?—in youth endued  
"With Right still present, still to be pursued,  
"Thro' all the interchange of circles, rife  
"Each with its proper law and mode of life,  
"Each to be dwelt at ease in : where, to sway  
"Absolute with the Kaiser, or obey  
"Implicit with his serf of fluttering heart,  
"Or, like a sudden thought of God's, to start

"Up, Brutus in the presence, then go shout  
"That some should pick the unstrung jewels out—  
"Each, well!"

And, as in moments when the past  
Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast  
Himself quite through mere secondary states  
Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates,  
Into the mid deep yearnings overlaid  
By these ; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove, glade,  
And on into the very nucleus probe  
That first determined there exist a globe.  
As that were easiest, half the globe dissolved,  
So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved  
By his flesh-half's break-up ; the sudden swell  
Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,  
Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness,  
Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less,  
All qualities, in fine, recorded here,  
Might be but modes of Time and this one sphere,  
Urgent on these, but not of force to bind  
Eternity, as Time—as Matter—Mind,  
If Mind, Eternity, should choose assert  
Their attributes within a Life : thus girt  
With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct  
Quite otherwise—with Good and Ill distinct,  
Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result—

Contrived to render easy, difficult,  
This or the other course of . . . what new bond  
In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond  
Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good  
To its arrangements. Once this understood,  
As suddenly he felt himself alone,  
Quite out of Time and this world : all was known.  
What made the secret of his past despair?  
—Most imminent when he seemed most aware  
Of his own self-sufficiency : made mad  
By craving to expand the power he had,  
And not new power to be expanded ?—just  
This made it ; Soul on Matter being thrust,  
Joy comes when so much Soul is wreaked in Time  
On Matter : let the Soul's attempt sublime  
Matter beyond the scheme and so prevent  
By more or less that deed's accomplishment,  
And Sorrow follows : Sorrow how avoid?  
Let the employer match the thing employed,  
Fit to the finite his infinity,  
And thus proceed for ever, in degree  
Changed but in kind the same, still limited  
To the appointed circumstance and dead  
To all beyond. A sphere is but a sphere ;  
Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here ;  
Since to the spirit's absoluteness all

Are like. Now, of the present sphere we call  
Life, ~~are~~ conditions ; take but this among  
Many ; the body was to be so long  
Youthful, no longer : but, since no control  
Tied to that body's purposes his soul,  
She chose to understand the body's trade  
More than the body's self—had fain conveyed  
Her boundless to the body's bounded lot.  
Hence, the soul permanent, the body not,—  
Scarcely its minute for enjoying here,—  
The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,  
Run o'er its capabilities and wring  
A joy thence, she held worth experiencing :  
Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,  
The minute gone, the body's power let go  
Apportioned to that joy's acquirement ! Broke  
Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke—  
From the volcano's vapour-flag, winds hoist  
Black o'er the spread of sea,—down to the moist  
Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,  
Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again—  
The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great  
To the soul's absoluteness. Meditate  
Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord  
And the whole music it was framed afford,—  
The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck

One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck  
And then no marvel if the spirit, shown  
A saddest sight—the body lost alone  
Through her officious proffered help, deprived  
Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,—  
Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence,—  
Vain-gloriously were fain, for recompense,  
To stem the ruin even yet, protract  
The body's term, supply the power it lacked  
From her infinity, compel it learn  
These qualities were only Time's concern,  
And body may, with spirit helping, barred—  
Advance the same, vanquished—obtain reward,  
Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,  
Of Wrong make Right, and turn Ill Good below.  
And the result is, the poor body soon  
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,  
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.

So much was plain then, proper in the past ;  
To be complete for, satisfy the whole  
Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul  
Needs must exceed, prove incomplete for, each  
Single sphere—Time. But does our knowledge reach  
No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke,  
But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,  
Its loves and hates, as now when death lets soar

Sordello, self-sufficient as before,  
Though during the mere space that shall elapse  
'Twixt his enthralment in new bonds perhaps?  
Must life be ever just escaped, which should  
Have been enjoyed?—nay, might have been and would.  
Each purpose ordered right—the soul 's no whit  
Beyond the body's purpose under it.  
Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,  
And that sky-space of water, ray for ray  
And star for star, one richness where they mixed  
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,  
Tumultuary splendours folded in  
To die—would soul, proportioned thus, begin  
Exciting discontent, or surelier quell  
The body if, aspiring, it rebel?  
But how so order life? Still brutalize  
The soul, the sad world's way, with muffled eyes  
To all that was before, all that shall be  
After this sphere—all and each quality  
Save some sole and immutable Great, Good  
And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood  
To follow? Never may some soul see All  
—The Great Before and After, and the Small  
Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,  
And take the single course prescribed before,  
As the king-bird with ages on his plumes

Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?  
But where descry the Love that shall select  
That course? Here is a soul whom, to affect,  
Nature has plied with all her means, from trees  
And flowers e'en to the Multitude!—and these,  
Decides he save or no? One word to end!

Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend  
And speak for you. Of a Power above you still  
Which, utterly incomprehensible,  
Is out of rivalry, which thus you can  
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man—  
What need! And of—none the minutest duct  
To that out-nature, nought that would instruct  
And so let rivalry begin to live—  
But of a Power its representative  
Who, being for authority the same,  
Communication different, should claim  
A course, the first chose but this last revealed—  
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—  
What utter need!

What has Sordello found?  
Or can his spirit go the mighty round,  
End where poor Eglamor begun? So, says  
Old fable, the two eagles went two ways  
About the world: where, in the midst, they met,  
Though on a shifting waste of sand, men set

Jove's temple. Quick, what has Sordello found?  
For they approach—approach—that foot's rebound  
Palma? No, Salinguerra though in mail;  
They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil  
Aside—and you divine who sat there dead,  
Under his foot the badge: still, Palma said,  
A triumph lingering in the wide eyes,  
Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies  
Help from above in his extreme despair,  
And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there  
With short quick passionate cry: as Palma pressed  
In one great kiss, her lips upon his breast,  
It beat.

By this, the hermit-bee has stopped  
His day's toil at Goito: the new-cropped  
Dead vine-leaf answers, now 't is eve, he bit,  
Twirled so, and filed all day: the mansion 's fit,  
God counselled for. As easy guess the word  
That passed betwixt them, and become the third  
To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax  
Him with one fault—so, no remembrance racks  
Of the stone maidens and the font of stone  
He, creeping through the crevice, leaves alone.  
Alas, my friend, alas Sordello, whom  
Anon they laid within that old font-tomb,  
And, yet again, alas!

And now is 't worth  
Our while bring back to mind, much less set forth  
How Salinguerra extricates himself  
Without Sordello? Ghibellin and Guelf  
May fight their fiercest out? If Richard sulked  
In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,  
Who cares, Sordello gone? The upshot, sure,  
Was peace; our chief made some frank overture  
That prospered; compliment fell thick and fast  
On its disposer, and Taurello passed  
With foe and friend for an outstripping soul,  
Nine days at least. Then,—fairly reached the goal.—  
He, by one effort, blotted the great hope  
Out of his mind, nor further tried to cope  
With Este, that mad evening's style, but sent  
Away the Legate and the League, content  
No blame at least the brothers had incurred,  
—Dispatched a message to the Monk, he heard  
Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at, . . .  
Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat  
And ne'er spoke more,—informed the Ferrarese  
He but retained their rule so long as these  
Lingered in pupilage,—and last, no mode  
Apparent else of keeping safe the road  
From Germany direct to Lombardy  
For Friedrich,—none, that is, to guarantee

The faith and promptitude of who should next  
Obtain Sofia's dowry,—sore perplexed—  
(Sofia being youngest of the tribe  
Of daughters, Ecelin was wont to bribe  
The envious magnates with—nor, since he sent  
Henry of Egna this fair child, had Trent  
Once failed the Kaiser's purposes—“we lost  
“Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post—  
“Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock?”)  
Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock  
In pure necessity, and, so destroyed  
His slender last of chances, quite made void  
Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes  
Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,  
Was sucked into Romano. And so hushed  
He up this evening's work that, when 't was brushed  
Somehow against by a blind chronicle  
Which, chronicling whatever woe befell  
Ferrara, noted this the obscure woe  
Of “Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo  
“Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his sire,”  
The townsfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire  
Which of Sofia's five was meant.

The chaps

Of earth's dead hope were tardy to collapse,  
Obliterated not the beautiful

Distinctive features at a crash : but dull  
And duller these, next year, as Guelfs withdrew  
Each to his stronghold. Then (securely too  
Ecelin at Campese slept ; close by,  
Who likes may see him in Solagna lie,  
With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote  
The cavalier he was)—then his heart smote  
Young Ecelin at last ; long since adult.  
And, save Vicenza's business, what result  
In blood and blaze ? (So hard to intercept  
Sordello till his plain withdrawal !) Stepped  
Then its new lord on Lombardy. I' the nick  
Of time when Ecelin and Alberic  
Closed with Taurello, come precisely news  
That in Verona half the souls refuse  
Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count—  
Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount,  
Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth.  
Ecelin flew there, and the town henceforth  
Was wholly his—Taurello sinking back  
From temporary station to a track  
That suited. News received of this acquist,  
Friedrich did come to Lombardy : who missed  
Taurello then ? Another year : they took  
Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook  
For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three

Of Guelfs conspired to call themselves “The Free,”  
Opposing Alberic,—vile Bassanese,—  
(Without Sordello!)—Ecelin at ease  
Slaughtered them so observably, that oft  
A little Salinguerra looked with soft  
Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age  
To get appointed his proud uncle’s page.  
More years passed, and that sire had dwindled down  
To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown  
Better through age, his parts still in repute,  
Subtle—how else?—but hardly so astute  
As his contemporaneous friends professed;  
Undoubtedly a brawler: for the rest,  
Known by each neighbour, and allowed for, let  
Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret  
Men who would miss their boyhood’s bugbear: “trap  
“The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap  
“A battered pinion!”—was the word. In fine,  
One flap too much and Venice’s marine  
Was meddled with; no overlooking that!  
She captured him in his Ferrara, fat  
. And florid at a banquet, more by fraud  
Than force, to speak the truth; there’s slender laud  
Ascribed you for assisting eighty years  
To pull his death on such a man; fate shears  
The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine threads

You fritter : so, presiding his board-head,  
The old smile, your assurance all went well  
With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell !)  
In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,  
Made some pretence at fighting, some amends  
For the shame done his eighty years—(apart  
The principle, none found it in his heart  
To be much angry with Taurello)—gained  
Their galleys with the prize, and what remained  
But carry him to Venice for a show ?  
—Set him, as 't were, down gently—free to go  
His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe  
The swallows soaring their eternal curve  
'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens  
Gathered importunately, fives and tens,  
To point their children the Magnifico,  
All but a monarch once in firm-land, go  
His gait among them now—“ it took, indeed,  
“ Fully this Ecelin to supersede  
“ That man,” remarked the seniors. Singular !  
Sordello’s inability to bar  
Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought  
About by his strange disbelief that aught  
Was ever to be done,—this thrust the Twain  
Under Taurello’s tutelage,—whom, brain  
And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod

Indissolubly bound to baffle God  
Who loves the world—and thus allowed the thin  
Grey wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,  
And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic  
(Mere man, alas !) to put his problem quick  
To demonstration—prove wherever's will  
To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill  
Or good. Anointed, then, to rend and rip—  
Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip,  
They plagued the world : a touch of Hildebrand  
(So far from obsolete !) made Lombards band  
Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,  
And saving Milan win the world's applause.  
Ecelin perished : and I think grass grew  
Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù  
By San Zenon where Alberic in turn  
Saw his exasperated captors burn  
Seven children and their mother ; then, regaled  
So far, tied on to a wild horse, was trailed  
To death through rounce and bramble-bush. I take  
God's part and testify that 'mid the brake  
Wild o'er his castle on the pleasant knoll,  
You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll—  
The earthquake spared it last year, laying flat  
The modern church beneath,—no harm in that !  
Chirrups the contumacious grasshopper,

Rustles the lizard and the cushats chirre  
Above the ravage : there, at deep of day  
A week since, heard I the old Canon say  
He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst  
And Alberic's huge skeleton unhearsed  
Only five years ago. He added, " June 's  
" The month for carding off our first cocoons  
" The silkworms fabricate"—a double news,  
Nor he nor I could tell the worthier. Choose !

And Naddo gone, all 's gone ; not Eglamor !  
Believe, I knew the face I waited for,  
A guest my spirit of the golden courts !  
Oh strange to see how, despite ill-reports,  
Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained  
Its joyous look of love ! Suns waxed and waned,  
And still my spirit held an upward flight,  
Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light  
More and more gorgeous—ever that face there  
The last admitted ! crossed, too, with some care  
As perfect triumph were not sure for all,  
But, on a few, enduring damp must fall,  
—A transient struggle, haply a painful sense  
Of the inferior nature's clinging—whence  
Slight starting tears easily wiped away,  
Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play  
Of irrepressible admiration—not

Aspiring, all considered, to their lot  
Who ever, just as they prepare ascend  
Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend  
Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,  
That upturned fervid face and hair put back !

Is there no more to say? He of the rhymes—  
Many a tale, of this retreat betimes,  
Was born : Sordello die at once for men?  
The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen  
Telling how *Sordello Prince Visconti* saved  
Mantua, and elsewhere notably behaved—  
Who thus, by fortune ordering events,  
Passed with posterity, to all intents,  
For just the god he never could become.  
As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb  
In praise of him : while what he should have been,  
Could be, and was not—the one step too mean  
For him to take,—we suffer at this day  
Because of: Ecelin had pushed away  
Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take  
That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake :  
~~He~~ did much—but Sordello's chance was gone.  
Thus, had Sordello dared that step alone,  
Apollo had been compassed : 't was a fit  
He wished should go to him, not he to it

Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed  
Really at home—one who was chiefly glad  
To have achieved the few real deeds he had,  
Because that way assured they were not worth  
Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—  
A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes  
Never itself, itself. Had he embraced  
Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit  
And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot  
All he was anxious to appear, but scarce  
Solicitous to be. A sorry farce  
Such life is, after all! Cannot I say  
He lived for some one better thing? this way.—  
Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill  
By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,  
Morning just up, higher and higher runs  
A child barefoot and rosy. See! the sun 's  
On the square castle's inner-court's low wall  
Like the chine of some extinct animal  
Half turned to earth and flowers; and through the  
haze  
(Save where some slender patches of grey maize  
Are to be overleaped) that boy has crossed  
The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost  
Matting the balm and mountain camomile.  
Up and up goes he, singing all the while

Some unintelligible words to beat  
The lark, God's poet, swooning at his feet,  
So worsted is he at "the few fine locks  
"Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks  
"Sun-blanch'd the livelong summer,"—all that's left  
Of the Goito lay ! And thus bereft,  
Sleep and forgot, Sordello ! In effect  
He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect  
Not utterly companionless ; but, friends,  
Wake up ! The ghost 's gone, and the story ends  
I 'd fain hope, sweetly ; seeing, peri or ghoul,  
That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,  
Evil or good, judicious authors think,  
According as they vanish in a stink  
Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank ! ye snuff  
Civet, I warrant. Really ? Like enough !  
Merely the savour's rareness ; any nose  
May ravage with impunity a rose :  
Rifle a musk-pod and 't will ache like yours !  
I 'd tell you that same pungency ensures  
An after-gust, but that were overbold.  
Who would has heard Sordello's story told.